Chapter 15 – Don't Lie

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Two women rode on a 2-horse drawn carriage, while a young man trailed behind them on a large horse. This irregular group approached a checkpoint in the Imperial Capital.

The stationed soldiers went around to the rear of the carriage in order to check its contents.

「Hey.」

The horse mounted man called out to them.

The soldier was indignant at being casually called out by the mounted man. But on the off chance that he was an arrogant noble, it may become troublesome, so he endured it.

「What is it?」

「Is it still necessary to verify even with this official document?」

The mounted man unfurled and displayed a piece of paper rarely seen at a checkpoint. Thus the soldier realized the gravity of the situation.

「Proof of Trade of Aqua Sapphire…… 」

「It's in the crate inside the carriage. Confirm it.」

「Un, understood」

The soldier opened the crate, finding an aqua sapphire clearly packed in a cushion of wood shavings, with a magnificent cut for a finishing touch. Of all the aqua sapphires he'd seen up until now, he'd understood just by glancing at it, that this was a particularly high class item.

He confirmed that it does not differ in size or shape from what is described in the document, he then closed the crate and secured the lock tightly.

「Confirmation complete. Other luggage is only provisions for travel. I need to hear it just to be sure, what's your destination?」

The soldier jotted down his signature on the memo using charcoal. questioning them while returning the official document. The man on the horse smiled from ear to ear as he took out a new document to show to him.

「Just the neighboring country. Here is the permission.」

A document indicating free ingoing and outgoing passage from this country was shown to the soldier, it clearly shows the signature of Princess Imeraria. Also attached is a medal indicating a noble rank.

「Please forgive me! By all means please pass.」

「 You don’t have to mind it. Its a thorough job anyway. 」

「Thank you very much! 」

As soldiers stood at attention to send the party off, the carriage began to advance while the young man continued following behind it.

After the carriage left their sight, the men let out a breath of relief.

「……Was there such a noble?」

「That document has Imeraria-sama’s signature, and the name Hifumi Touno is rather unusual. By chance is he the rumored “Slender Sword Knight” ? 」

「I see, the rumored newcomer that Imeraria-sama favors. 」

The “Slender Sword Knight” which the soldiers were talking about was Hifumi’s nickname, the man riding on the horse with haughty attitude was definitely Hifumi, how the nickname came to be, he hadn’t the foggiest.

A certain female guild staff member whimsically coined it, and due to the speed of Hifumi’s hunting and the impact of that first event, it had spread in the blink of an eye.

Before the nickname started spreading, Hifumi was busy preparing for the journey, so he hadn’t returned to the guild. Thus the nickname never reached his ears.

In the future Hifumi will become aware of it and it will become an established fact, but that’s a story for another time.

「Trying to behave and act like a noble sure is troublesome. 」

「Considering all that, why do I feel that you’ve already mastered it? 」

Having completely left the vicinity of the Royal Capital, Hifumi quickly stowed the carriage into the Dark Hole’s Storage.

Now everyone is riding their own horses and are galloping like the wind .

「 No, this kind of haughty attitude, roughly speaking, I dislike it. Though I pretended to have the nobles’ attitude, it doesn’t feel too good.」

「 Master, what are you saying this late in the game….. 」

As far as Hifumi was concerned, nobles seemed to be showing off what they had without making any effort solely due to their lineage. The reason for this seemed to be the wildly different leadership and instruction. The subtle differences were not conveyed to Kasha.

「Master, the road sign ahead on the highway…… 」

Origa who was holding a staff and the reins in both hands suddenly called out to Hifumi. All of them slowed down.

Origa didn’t talk much all the while because she was concentrating her magic, she was still not used to using the new magic the she and Hifumi developed together. After they left the Royal Capital and change from carriage to horses, her concentration was always on the staff in her hands.

Being aware of the degree of freedom in practising magic, Hifumi introduced the wind magic capable Origa to the concept of sound being transmitted by air vibrations, using it to detect movements in their surroundings. It was particularly successful in detecting obstacles ahead.

Since only Origa could use the sound wave perception skill, Hifumi did not know precisely how it felt, but by using a simple string telephone, he roughly explained the mechanics of sound transmittance. Half of the practice time was devoted to the development of this magic.

In spite of it being a still-developing magic, distance, number of obstacles, size, etc. can be determined fairly accurately.

「 There are probably people ahead. Further on the highway…… There are 10 people. 」

「 Just right. 」

The detection wave advances forward for up to one minute making contact with everything within that range. Since Origa was still incapable of exercising it to such a degree, she decided to practice it more. Incidentally, since Origa requested it to be named, after worrying a lot, it was named as “Echolocation”. Thinking about it, it may be because it was inspired by the sound wave perception that bats use.

Reigning in his horse, Hifumi told Origa and Kasha to dismount and prepare their weapons.

「 First, I will meet them. This close to town, in all probability, those fools are thieves waiting to perform an ambush. There are a considerable number of them. 」

Hifumi drew his katana without descending from his horse. Though different from a longsword, on horseback, it will not be a problem with thieves as opponents.

「 I will suitably thin their numbers, follow from the back. Lets use this opportunity to refine your close combat skills. Kasha, without fail kill a person with no more than 2 strikes. Origa, you must use the shuriken. 」

「 Roger! 」

「 Understood. 」

Hearing their highly confident responses, Hifumi bent low over his horse and made it gallop.

「Stop ! 」

Five men with weapons in dirty, ill-fitting clothes blocked the highway on which Hifumi advanced. From their appearance and bloodthirst, he judged them to be thieves.

There seem to be hidden presences on both sides of the highway.

「 Leave your valuables for your life……. Buh?! 」

Leisurely ignoring the speaker, Hifumi rode past the thieves without reducing his speed.

The thief’s face split open, as did his carotid artery.

As the thieves uncomprehendingly stared at their companion falling in a spray of blood, Hifumi turned around and charged towards them.

Flusteredly they raised their weapons, too slowly.

This time Hifumi jumped down from the galloping horse while maintaining his momentum, beheaded one of the thieves, as he rolled safely to the ground. The thief’s head was completely destroyed during Hifumi’s rolling fall.

Two people were killed in a blink of an eye, the remaining three thieves got indecisive.

It was then that 3 people on each side of the highway came to flank them on both sides.

11 people in total huh. 1 unaccounted person was cleverly hidden, did she overlook it?

While calmly confirming the result of Origa's new magic, Hifumi stowed his sword, and took out a new weapon.

The blade of about 30cm was attached perpendicular to the handle of the weapon, (attached to the other end is a chain with a heavy weight called the fundo at the end of it). It was a Kusarigama.

While Thorn was creating the weapon, a remark of 「I can't imagine how to use this」was made. Hifumi appraised the weapon as very well done. The handle and the size of the blade was good. The length of the chain and the weight of the fundo was per the specifications.

The sickle was held in the right hand, while the fundo was being spun in the other. This appeared bizarre to the inhabitants of this world.

The thieves weren't able to judge on what kind of weapon the young man was holding because it was strange, because of that they were not able to attack immediately.

「GUA！」

Suddenly, one thief fell down.

Looking at it, you could recognize a shuriken was stuck behind the head.

Origa

Hifumi felt admiration that she practiced skillfully, in addition the thieves were even more confused as another one was cut down. Kasha had sliced off a head in one strike. Also her movements had became more refined that before, her large swings were gone, and her swords were tightly controlled by her skills.

While seeing such growth from the two of them, Hifumi threw the fundo towards one of the thieves who looked away from him and it smashed his skull to pieces.

An arm was cut by Origa's magic and Kasha's sword gave the finishing blow, their coordination was splendid as expected.

The two of them cleaned up the remaining thieves, from here on out Hifumi needed to think about some guidelines.

All the thieves were killed instantly, the section of the highway was dyed with blood.

「This is well done. Although I hammered it into you in a short time, you moved pretty well.」

「Thank you very much.」

「But.」

Hifumi pointed at one thief who collapsed. There stuck a shuriken in the back of the shabby leather armor.

「I have dealt a fatal blow to him…… Origa, do you know why this is bad? 」

「I hit a section of the armor that the blade of the shuriken wasn't able to penetrate…… I think. 」

Although they were praised and rejoiced for a moment, for Origa their mistake was to be ashamed of, but Hifumi said 「It is not so 」.

「You can hit anywhere. Originally, shuriken rarely deal fatal blows. That first piece of shit was just a fluke(where she got a headshot). The problem is, this dickhead wasn't aware a shuriken was stuck to his leather armor」

Hifumi was observing firmly. This guy was supposed to be panicking, but his mind was occupied with dealing with Hifumi's movement, so he wasn't able to notice it immediately.

「This was a useless move. Even if you hit the armor, you should hit the front section where they could see. It incites fear, you create an opening for the other person to deal the finishing blow. 」

「I see…… I shall devote myself to it.」

「Next is Kasha.」

「Eh, me?」

That excellent fight was thoroughly analyzed, Kasha admired how the others fought, but it was now Kasha's turn to receive some advice.

She thought that she had performed well, but she was surprised that she was called out suddenly.

「Look at your sword. The one you're holding on your right hand. It seems a little bit was chipped off. 」

「That's not true!　…… Oh its true. It's chipped a little bit. When was it? 」

The fact is she didn't notice at all, Kasha tilted her head to the side while being baffled, Hifumi pointed at another male corpse.

「It was when you stabbed that guy. I can sense that you stabbed him while hitting the bone with too much force. 」

The thinnest section of the blade is certainly fragile compared to a human bone which is really hard. If you force it to attack at an odd angle, the sword will receive some damage.

「During stabbing firmly hold the sword sideways , Do not strike the ribs, you need to learn to avoid the middle where the sternum and the spine is located.」

「Oh…… but, but my opponent has this odd round body, that's why…… 」

「If that's the case, cut the face and not the body. That's enough to stop him. 」

The excuse was flatly rejected, Kasha's shoulders drooped, just like Origa's.

Hifumi's actions afterward, as far as Kasha and Origa were concerned, would become their trauma in the future.

「Good, now that we have teaching materials here, I will explain a little bit about the structure of the human body. 」

「Eh? Human body's… structure? 」

「Teaching materials…… Is it? Don't tell me…… 」

「Here we go. At the front of the body is the sternum and here is the spine, these ones here on the sides are the ribs…… 」

「Ulp…… Blegh…… 」

「Uegh!…… Retch…… 」

Hifumi suddenly cut open the body of the thief with a sword, then began to explain the skeletal system. Origa and Kasha started vomiting even before they'd heard the explanation.

Fukaroru, the town that Viscount Hagenti governs.

The town filled with Origa and Kasha's bitter memories.

A horse-drawn carriage approached the entryway from the highway. A young man riding a large horse trailed behind it.

Drawing nearer to the town, Kasha and Origa were made to sit on the coachman's seat of the carriage. They were wearing mantles, hoods low over their eyes, concealing them. Since they they had the appearance of female drivers who do that to avoid sunlight, the soldiers on Fukaroru's checkpost did not think it was unnatural.

「 In various ways, it's good the thieves were already dead….. 」

「 Don't remind me Kasha. I'm putting my mind and heart in order, please talk about something else. 」

Watching their bile rise, as they were still unused to that feeling, Hifumi was subtly worried. While concluding the open air classroom with an explanation of body parts and the skeletal structure, the two had received serious damage. Primarily the mental kind.

If not for the hoods, two ghastly pale and tearful faces would have been seen while driving the carriage.

If there was a little more flexibility in their attitudes, maybe they would have been able to brace themselves while arriving at their first destination. They felt like vomiting again if they got fired up, and their feelings of not wanting to get up were strong.

Arriving at the entrance of the town, of the two soldiers at the gate, one approached.

If it is not the man that Origa and Kasha recognised, a cough was supposed to be given, Hifumi told them to remain silent if it is the one they remembered…….. The cough did not come.

「 Stop. The contents of the carriage are to be verified. 」

「 Understood. Since the cargo of this trip is a wooden box containing an Aqua Sapphire, a signature of confirmation is necessary. 」

Unlike the time at the castle town, Hifumi dismounted, and took out a proof of trade for the Aqua Sapphire.

「 Is this the Aqua Sapphire? Yosh, here's the box. 」

The man opened the box with a strangely practiced hand, unnaturally nodded, closed the wooden box, and signed on the permit.

At that instant, Hifumi kicked the man's abdomen and sent him flying.

「 GUH!? Wh-What are you doing! 」

Quickly approaching the soldier on the ground, Hifumi flipped him while twisting his arm upwards and pinned him to the ground facedown.

To the sudden assault, the other soldier at the gate pulled out his sword in a hurry and ran forwards.

A cough was heard from Origa and Kasha.

「 You bastard! What are you doing! 」

「 Calm down. This is who I am. 」

The soldier running forward was shown the same permit and coin indicating his rank. Hifumi directed his gaze at the soldier on the ground and inspected his torso.

Reluctantly following his gaze, the Aqua Sapphire shone on the soldier's chest.

「 Th-This is…… Guzafan, you! 」

The man caught by Hifumi seemed to be called Guzafan. The other soldier had an expression of not knowing what to do after the sudden exposure of his colleague's crime.

Putting more power into twisting the soldier's arm, Hifumi asked him in a low voice

「 There was a circulation permit verifying this jewel, the box is closed, there is this fellow's signature. Nevertheless, the Aqua Sapphire has appeared from this fellow's chest…… Well, let's have the explanation. And whether or not "we" understand, let us see… 」

When Guzafan looked up, Origa and Kasha had taken off their hoods. Their faces brimming with anger, he recognised them. Wielding weapons, filled with strength.

「 Y-You fellows! You were supposed to have fallen into slavery… 」

「 Come now, speak quickly. What's your excuse for deceiving and turning the tender-hearted me into a scary woman? What could it be, I wonder? 」(Kasha)

In contrast to the slaves' anger, Hifumi laughed loudly.

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Chapter 16 – Viva la Vida

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Hifumi quickly tied Guzafan up with a rope and had him loaded into the carriage. Then he asked the remaining soldiers to call the person in charge. Guzafan was thrown in front Origa and Kasha.

「Origa, this is the shithead that stole the noble's personal property, What kind of punishment will he receive?」

「…… According to the laws of Orson Grande, an arm is expected to be cut off…… 」

「 Although the harm done to us by the incident with the noble is much worse. His punishment must still be within legal limits.」

As Kasha's words took over Origa's, Guzafan's face turned pale, he looked toward Hifumi for respite.

「 Ple, please forgive me! I was only ordered to…… 」

「 Really, what were the instructions given and who gave them」

「That, that is…… 」

Guzafan couldn't answer. Even if he is not killed by Hifumi, if he gave out the official's name it will be only a matter of time before he is killed by the accomplice.

「You cannot say? Then…… 」

「Please wait! I will say it! Im gonna say it! 」

Speaking honestly might have delayed his disappearance, but not speaking would be certain death. In that case, since it couldn't be helped Guzafan begged for his life with a tear-streaked and disheveled face. Seeing this pathetic figure, Origa and Kasha were somewhat disgusted.

「 Being deceived by such a miserable person……. 」

「 Really. Even the desire to kill has dissipated…. 」

While saying that, the soldier from before ran out of town. Immediately behind him were a group of about 15 people. Since all of them wore armour similar to Guzafan's, they were probably soldiers of the town.

Seeing them run in their direction, Hifumi instantly noticed something and started running towards the group.

「 Behind! 」

Hearing Hifumi's yell, the soldier turned around, and before he knew it, the backup force behind him had drawn their swords.

「 Eh, what….. 」

Inadvertently halting, the soldier muttered upon seeing his colleagues face someone, not Guzafan, but him.

No, it wasn't his imagination. The eyes of the lead soldier were clearly on him. The lead soldier raised his sword, clearly aiming for him.

「 Uwaaa! 」

「 Dodge it you fool! 」

Hifumi pushed away the soldier that was about to be cut, by a hairs breadth. Lashing out at the lead soldier with a frontal kick, while dodging the swung blade.

However the lead soldier only stumbled a step back and didn't fall down.

「Nuu, stop your resistance！ you thieves！」

The lead soldier intimidates him and the soldiers surround Hifumi in a line with their swords drawn.

Several people appear to be heading towards Kasha and Origa.

「This piece of shit thief seems to be from your place。Is your head boiled?」

Hifumi drew his slender katana, and with knit brows, as if spitting out his words:

「 So you're their boss. I knew you couldn't discipline them, but I guess it can't be helped if the one disciplining them is trash, right? Hm? 」

Whether they heard Hifumi's provocation or not, the lead soldier steadies his sword again and says to his subordinates.

「This man is a noble who swindles, for him to frame and attempt to kill us is foolish! Arrest him on the spot!」

Purposely ignoring it, he yelled out loud so that the surrounding commoners can hear what he's saying. Hifumi thought that this is an explanation. Using "That's how it is" to dispose of inconveniences. It seems this isn't his first offence and he's quite used to it.

When it comes to it, Hifumi had only one choice.

「Understood. It seems talking to you is a waste of time. Come, I'm gonna kill you all together 」

「Don't underestimate me youngster！ Die！」

Once again the lead soldier raised his sword and slashed diagonally from the shoulder, but during the downward slash, a sword struck his left eye. The blade then swept through his brain, and the soldier's long life ended quickly.

「Origa, Kasha! Kill them as I have taught you, do it with all your might! 」

Hifumi didn't see if both of the girls reacted to his voice.

Judging that Hifumi was more dangerous than the two women. Besides thelead soldier, the other 10 soldiers surrounded him.

Seeing that the lead soldier was dead, unrest ran through the soldiers, but comprehending that not getting rid of Hifumi would be dangerous, they immediately recovered and rushed at him.

Kasha and Origa have no practice in combat with multiple opponents. There are too many people to start teaching

them now…

Although he was thinking that in an easygoing way, Hifumi's movements were quick.

Before the soldiers' attacks arrived, he quickly turned around and swapped places with a suitable person behind him.

「 Gua..! 」

Crammed into the place where Hifumi was before, many blades arced, voices were raised in anguish, and the man died.

Meanwhile moving further, a soldier's head was lopped off, and Hifumi stored his katana.

A kusarigama was taken out.

The chain bound two people together at the neck, pulled them back, and then threw them to the ground.

You could hear the muffled sound of a necks breaking. The two of them died together, the chain was untied without confirming their deaths, and the blade of the sickle cut into a nearby person's neck.

The blood spray was avoided to deal with another opponent, a sword was thrust but the chain wrapped around it and and pulled, snatching it away. The sickle was driven through the opening on the side of the armor, slicing the stomach open with all his might.

The soldier was stunned while staring at his own intestines messily flowing out, and died before he became fully aware of it.

「 Half of them left. No resistance at all. You all aren't even worth killing if you don't persevere a little bit more 」

Hifumi bragged, stating that he was disappointed, all while slashing at another oncoming person. A swipe at the soldier's leg and the soldier would easily fall, then gently slash the carotid artery with the sickle.

The remaining soldiers were killed brutally. Hifumi, surrounded by dead bodies, turned his focus toward Origa and Kasha.

Those two each have an opponent, but had already defeated them.

Origa prevented them from approaching by hurting them with shurikens, and when their movements became dull, she chanted wind magic to cut their heads off. The accuracy of her magic is rising, and the sharpness seemed to have increased as well.

Conversely, Kasha was fighting with her 2 swords nearby, she repeatedly attacks the upper body with the right sword and when the opponent blocks her attack she will suddenly stab the opponent's thigh with her left sword causing the opponent to stop on his tracks, then she will deal the killing blow by slicing through the throat.

「 Great, you did well」

Hifumi was looking around while praising them quickly. The townspeople who were there from the beginning were afraid of being caught up in the fighting, none of them dared to run.

Only Hifumi and the gang survived with Guzafan still tied down and the man who called the group of soldiers.

The battle was confirmed to be over, the soldier who was unsteadily trying to stand up asked Hifumi for his name and introduced himself as Tamuzu.

「What the hell happened here……」

In front of the dumbfounded Tamuzu, objects that appear to be people were scattered all over the place and the smell of blood permeated the air from the town entrance.

「You still don't know even though you were watching from a special seat?　Guzafan is a fool who rummages through travelers' luggages, the ones felled here are your colleges, including your boss.」

Whether he can't admit it or the shock was too big to think of anything Tamuzu could only remain silent.

Hifumi decided to leave it alone because it didn't matter. He stood in front of Guzafan who was terrified from seeing his accomplices completely annihilated.

「You, don't you what's going to happen because of your actions……」

「What's going to happen？　Are the numbers coming going to double？Is a stronger guy going to appear？　Or are going to say some famous guy is going to appear？」

Without waiting for Guzafan to answer, Hifumi kept rattled on.

「There's too many people like you on their high horses, thinking they are great. Look at those corpses. Can you tell who's your colleague, your boss? Which flesh is your friends'? Which internal organ is your boss'? If a human being is cut, their insides spill out and they die. Kings, knights, and thugs, it's all the same.」

The one listening to Hifumi's words is not only Guzafan. Origa and Kasha were also seriously listening.

「It's the same for you and me, the foundation for every human is the same. The only difference is their appearance, to distinguish them, what they think, and what they do. You guys only thought about doing bad things and were hostile to me. That was all.」

Ignoring Gazufan who was lost for words, Hifumi turned around to face Origa.

「This, understand that these guys are organized when committing the crime. Whether that asshole from before is the mastermind or just the lackey, we will know when we hear it. Therefore……」

Hifumi kicked Guzafan towards the two slaves

「If I were in your position, I would kill this guy. Nothing will happen even if you kill him, even the mastermind thought they are nothing, and would execute this guy. Therefore just kill him.」

This is revenge in the first place as Hifumi said.

And then, staring intently at Origa and Kasha one by one, he told them to make their own decisions.

Kasha was hesitant.

Her way of speaking was coarse and rough, completely opposite to her graceful appearance, and unlike her master Hifumi, she was a girl who could not stay calm after injuring good people.

If attacked by an opponent with weapons, one would naturally kill, since it is impossible to survive without doing so.

Even so, just for being an enemy, killing an enemy, especially one who is not resisting. Just for the sake of revenge, as a person, is it right to kill?

While Kasha was kneading around this question in her head, Origa calmly stood up.

「…… Kill him」

Origa said clearly.

「Kasha, pulling back now, I have a feeling that we will regret it. We had a hard time in the past. Kill him, if not, someone else will. After all, if master hadn't taken us at that time, how would we be able to take revenge with our own hands?」

Though this time, master arranged it, smiled Origa wryly.

That is so, Kasha's head cleared.

「We will bring down our enemies.」

Pulling out a single sword, Kasha smiled at Origa.

「Master, if it's alright, may I borrow master's "Katana"?」

No magic, realising that Origa wanted to kill with her own hands, Hifumi loosened his sword in the sheath, and pointed it towards Origa, hilt first.

Smoothly, the blade was drawn, light reflecting off its beautiful curve. The atmosphere changed. The fact that it was a tool to deprive life was forgotten.

Reverently receiving the sword, Origa stood awkwardly clasping the katana next to Kasha, looking down at Guzafan rolling underfoot.

「 P-Please sto-……I believed it was wrong. But after all, it was an order….」

「 Shut up. 」

Origa said in a cold voice. Kasha's mouth was drawn tensely.

「Think of death as salvation. The life of despair that we felt, savouring fear everyday for the agony that is to come. What kind of humiliation would we receive, the anxiousness of how we would die. It's better than living with our minds crushed by the gruesome picture of our future, even if we don't want to think about it. Because if it were possible to die, then that would be the end of it」

Origa looked at the close friend next to her who finished speaking.

Kasha only nodded once and at the same time Origa thrust

「Gi~ii…… ! 」

Guzafan only grit his teeth without even releasing any sound from the pain, he didn't die immediately.

Their sword damaged Guzafan's femoral artery, an enormous amount of blood flowed out, a little reprieve was given before he died.

「I'll watch the way you die. Look at our faces while you die in regret 」

「We regretted a lot during that time. To have been cheated by you. Therefore this time, you must regret a lot during that time.」

The two of them watched Guzafan's corpse emotionlessly.

Hifumi was silently watching, over looking them fondly, it's like looking at a beautiful, benevolent, and profound holy mother but the comparison was silly.

Guzafan died while muttering that he didn't want to die.

For Origa and Kasha, it was their first taste of revenge.

Origa and Kasha didn't say anything while Hifumi lead them to the dining room.

The time to eat was just approaching, but they did not leave, as Origa and Kasha seemed as though they did not want to move.

They were afraid to enter, since they might be refused entry, but after proving that they were working for the kingdom, they were reluctantly let in. After showing the medal of nobility, of course.

「This is bad. 」

While saying so, he gave the shop employee a huge amount of money and told them to bring suitable dishes.

「How long are you going to be engrossed. You should wake up anytime now」

「I'm, I'm deeply sorry」

「……To bask yourselves in a little sentimentality is ok, but…」

Origa remembered that they were slaves and got flustered, while Kasha pouted her lips in dissatisfaction. Hifumi thought they were strong women. Having experienced quite a bit of shock, there seemed to be no problem.

「Don't be satisfied with defeating that one person who is at most a piece of shit underling. After this isn't there

more people to kill and places to go?」

「……To kill with reason huh」

「 There should be a suspicious high ranking dipshit behind this, it was bad luck that you had experienced a painful mistake but you had to do it again. 」

Therefore, erasing the hostile guy at the top should be done without regret. After that, you'll feel better, said Hifumi.

In front of these three, a succession of dishes were lined up one by one.

Though somewhat larger portions and strangely luxurious, it was because the shopkeeper knew Hifumi was a noble and worked harder at preparing the dishes.

In contrast to Origa and Kasha, who didn't have an appetite and were reservedly eating the tender pork sauted style steak and the fresh and crunchy salad, Hifumi simply gulped down his meal and announced his plans.

「 After eating, I will go to Viscount Hagenti's estate and say hello. 」

Upon hearing the plan, only Kasha's ears did not detect the declaration of a new massacre.

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Chapter 17 – Hail and Kill

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Nearby where they were eating, a young man approached Hifumi and co. He sported clothing resembling a merchant's, with a refreshing smile on his face.

「 Heeey, long time no see! When did you get here? 」

Sitting down next to Hifumi in a friendly manner, he passed him a note unseen by others around.

「 The meal has already ended, huh. There's a cafe nearby, how about it? 」

「 No, that is… 」

Not going along with the man's tension, Hifumi placed the note on the table.

「 There's no need for a performance. There are no suspicious people in the vicinity, so this kind of communication is unnecessary. Moreover, it's meaningless since I can't read. You're from the Third Knight Corps yes? 」

「 Certainly, the memo says he is from the Third Knight Corps. 」

Origa read the memo placed on the table.

As for the man, his smile slipped off, his precautions unnecessary.

「 Uu~, unable to read…… Then how did you notice I was a Knight? 」

「 Knights who receive training in marching walk in a manner different from normal people. 」

He was used to seeing it after Pajou and the others, and understood it immediately.

「 Then, what's the important matter? You fellows disappeared after leaving the capital. It seems that you guys operate only within the royal capital, huh… 」

「 Th-This is the matter. 」

The Knight straightened up and introduced himself as Sabnak. As of now still an inexperienced Knight, concealed in Fukaroru on his own as an apprentice merchant.

「 Well, in the matter of Marquis, the target of my observation is Viscount Hagenti. Since you disappeared, there was a report distributed via messenger bird from the capital, to continue watching from here. 」

From the fact that a carriage was prepared for them, the person in charge of the tracking was going to have them followed while pretending to be a merchant in a mercantile caravan.

However, since the carriage was immediately stored, and horses were used in leaving the capital, the trackers were left in the dust.

Sabnak followed them, he acted as a lone pursuer since the concept of acting in a 2 or 3 person cell didn't seem to exist here. Like the incident with Pajou, she wasn't carrying weapons during surveillance. Was it normal for them to operate alone?

「We don't have enough personnel. There are few applicants who wish to join the 3rd knights' corps, all the excellent applicants aimed for the Castle duty of the First Knight Corps, and any applicants who boast their strength picked the Second Knight Corps.」

「Generally only nobles can enlist for the Knight Corps. Being patient and stealthily mingling with the commoners makes the Third Knight Corps's job unpopular with the nobles. But, the Second Knight Corps only takes action in the event of a crisis, and the First Knight Corps doesn't actually experience field work, so it is believed that the Third Knights Corps is the most useful in protecting the citizens. 」

「……So?」

Sounding considerably annoyed, Hifumi shut Sabnak up with a single word.

「What do you want? Your work is to monitor me, you're not supposed to make contact with me, else the Third Knight Corps' involvement will be revealed. 」

「Ah, please excuse me……」

Sabnak just realized that he was heated up, he bowed down while blushing.

Remembering the un-knightly attitude of Midas and Pajou, Hifumi's evaluation of them was "The Third Knight Corps is a gathering of strange fellows".

Sabnak who received instructions from the capital, turned towards the entrance in a hurry, but already in its place was spread a scene nothing short of a picture of a hell.

Sabnak who looked directly at the familiar tragically scattered corpses, threw up gastric juices, he then pulled himself together and started searching for Hifumi.

「Honestly speaking, I want to capture Viscount Hagenti alive. There's also the confession from the Marquis. The Marquis issued instructions only to suck up profits. Specifically, we still don't know who's moving them and how.」

In reality, the one who caused the incident in the feudal town was Viscount Hagenti, who was part of the Marquis' faction.

As for the knight corps, according to princess Imeraria's instructions, thanks to Hifumi's actions they can push forward with an investigation unrelated to him, without restriction. He spoke honestly.

「I don't intend to bother or be hostile to you. To solve this matter and for Princess Imeraria to peacefully govern this country, we would like to receive your cooperation.」

Sabnak stood up and deeply bowed his head.

Sabnak recalled the corpses of the soldier he saw earlier. There are also an unbelievable number of reports related to Hifumi circulating from the capital. Its said that, anyone hostile to him, be they a king or noble will be killed without mercy. 10 members of the inner organisation were killed in a matter of seconds. Even without a weapon, he can lead knights by the nose bare-handed.

If one's words angers Hifumi, they will die where they stand. However, in order to improve this country as a knight, they absolutely had to deal with this matter and to sweep the surroundings of the royal family, he gambled on Hifumi.

「…… I don't particularly mind. 」

At Hifumi's words, Sabnak raised his head.

「 The Viscount does not particularly matter to me, but to Origa and Kasha, he is someone they want to take revenge against. I will talk to them and decide later. 」

Immediately after saying that, Hifumi stood up and left.

The persuasion target having changed, Sabnak was completely bewildered, not to mention the two slaves that were abruptly entrusted with the decision.

「 Ah-….. For now, could I have some tea? 」

Sabnak called the shop assistant to gloss over his red face while thinking 「 derailed! 」 embarrassedly.

Kasha could not help laughing.

「 Puu~…. Sorry, it's completely different from when you first called out to us. 」

「 No, it's fine. I practiced passing over the note several times at the back of the building while fired up. I had a small illness when I was younger, so I am a little unskilled at these sudden things. 」(TN: due to his illness when he was young, Sabnak can't easily cope up with sudden changes in a situation and gets flustered easily.)

Sabnak said he was not good at meeting others for the first time. Being assigned here was also because few spies wanted to polish their skills alone in a different land.

「 I'm sorry, I'm rambling. Well, about the matter with the Viscount….. 」

「 Before that, could you tell me what information the Knight Order has on the Marquis' faction? In case the Viscount is let free, if any other enemy can be killed, I may consent. 」

Sabnak thought about Origa's words a little. 「To agree」or 「 To not agree 」.

The positions of nobles and slaves, leaving aside comparing them, the chances of them sitting at the same table were virtually nonexistent. However, Sabnak reminded himself that Origa and Kasha were slaves of the "Slender sword Knight". He felt an overpowering intimidation from Origa and Kasha, unthinkable of ordinary young women.

「…… I understand. Where shall I start explaining? 」

After waiting for his tea, Sabnak began to speak.

At that time, Hifumi was aimlessly wandering the streets of the town.

His katana casually hung on his waist.

「 I wonder what that is? 」

Towards the center of the town, there was a residence much larger than the ones surrounding it.

Slowly drawing near, several soldiers ran out of the strong looking metal gate.

The soldiers had ghastly appearances. Passing by Hifumi, they ran towards the town gate. Apparently, they were the response to the previous completely annihilated unit.

「 …… So late. The guys watching were quite some distance away. As I thought, there's probably another mode of information delivery. 」

Muttering to no one in particular, Hifumi approached the gate the soldiers had run out of.

「 ……. There's no guards on watch. 」

It appeared that all military personnel had completely left for the scene.

Hifumi entered in a stately manner, in spite of his amazement. The moment he placed his hand on the door of the mansion, he suddenly felt a sense of unease and jumped back from the door.

A loud sound rang out, the wooden door fell to pieces.

Looking into the doorway that was suddenly well-ventilated, a face was seen.

「 The guy in the Marquis' mansion in the capital. If I recall correctly, your name was Strauss. 」

「 You remembered huh…. As I thought, I should have gotten rid of you back then… 」

There was a big hole from within the entranceway, Strauss fled back into the Marquis' Mansion while holding out a dagger followed by preparing to use magic.

Hifumi dodged without hesitation, and pulling back momentarily, ran around towards the side of the building while silencing his footsteps.

「Getting away? ! 」

He ignored Strauss' husky voice and continued to run.

I could sense 10 people inside the building. Since Strauss is out here alone, is one of them the Viscount? So the remainder are the servants?…… No, I could sense someone on the second floor…… It's Tamuzu. Why is he here?

He remembered the young soldier that stood still as he watched all manners of death, the young soldier that was about to be killed by his colleagues.

Hifumi had an unpleasant hunch so he looked up. At that instant, a maid who had opened the window to air the room saw him.

He jumped up, grabbed the edge of the window with his left hand, and slipped his body into the window at the last minute.

The maid was surprised and froze when he approached, she cracked a smile so he only gently hit the nape of her neck, knocking her unconscious.

I'm sorry that there are no beds.

He softly laid the maid's body down, and after confirming there was nobody else in the hallway he went into the room Tamuzu was located in.

He ran across the wooden floored hallway with considerable speed, you could only hear slight rustling of the clothes.

It's here.

Among the doors that lined the corridor, he stopped in front of the one that was particularly significant.

He could sense Tamuzu and another person behind it.

Unable to hear anything, he silently opened the door and peeked through the gap.

「……I understand the report. All of the remaining personnel went out?」

「Yes. The Vice Captain lead all the remaining personnel and went towards the scene.」

Speaking to Tamuzu was a gentleman-like person with a refined voice. Peeking through the gap, the gentleman seemed to be in his 40's, wearing brand new clothes with embroidery that identified with the aristocracy. He took something off of the shelves in front of Tamuzu after hearing Tamuzu's report.

That's Viscount Hagenti over there huh..

「However…… Commanding officer Guzafan was an accomplice, it is deplorable.」

「Regrettable…… That's right, it's regrettable」

Hagenti took out a sword.

Holding the sword straight, it was 70cm long and had decorations for some kind of ceremony.

The Viscount having turned his back towards Tamuzu, gazed at the blade of the sword carefully while drawing it out.

「It's a serious crime. Many soldiers were lost. Well then, we should request a Knight's investigation here…… 」

Apparently, it seems Tamuzu is complaining to Hagenti because the ringleader of the evil deeds was the lead soldier. Moreover, he proposed getting the country to intervene.

That guy is a fool.

The idea that they were Hagenti's instructions did not come to mind. That aside, would any noble inform the country of any blunder in their own territory?

「You」

Hagenti muttered in a low voice and further lowering it said

「If you'd stayed silent, this wouldn't have been necessary.」

Turning around, Hagenti thrust the sword. Tamuzu couldn't react in time.

Tamuzu collapsed after the sword struck his stomach and looked up at Hagenti without being able to make a sound.

Hifumi slipped into the room while Hagenti was occupied with the collapsed Tamuzu.

When Hagenti noticed Hifumi's intrusion, that figure was already in front of him.

「Uoo！」

Hagenti slashed with the sword that he was holding in the spur of the moment, but it was too late.

A fist drove into the sword-brandishing Hagenti's solar plexus, his eyes turned white and fainted.

Hifumi looked at the fallen Tamuzu, however it was too late. He was dead.

Hifumi noticed indications of something hidden behind Hagenti's writing desk, so he turned it over.

In a single beat, the painting that hung on the wall above was sliced.

Falling from the gash in the painting, scattering documents fell down.

Looking at the state of affairs, Hifumi nodded to himself.

「 Found it at last 」

Strauss had entered the room.

「 You're slow. The task here is done, you can entertain me. 」

Hidden in the shadow of the desk, Hifumi put away his katana and brought out his kusarigama.

「 It's over is it? Is Hagenti dead? 」

「 No. 」

Hifumi rose, leisurely swinging the chain, sickle in one hand.

「 We can still fight a little bit more. I'm letting him live for now 」

「 …… It is regrettable that I withdrew before. By no means did I think you'd be a hindrance here. I should have killed you at that time 」(Strauss)

Strauss pointed his dagger at Hifumi and began to chant quietly.

Hifumi continued swinging the fundou, the same as ever, without taking up any particular stance.

「 ……. Are you finally prepared? Die! 」

Though the wind blades attacked Hifumi, a gust of wind produced by the fundou dispersed their destructive force and disappeared.

「 What!!?? 」

Strauss had absolute confidence in his wind blade magic, he was unable to hide his surprise at seeing it so easily erased.

「 You bastard, what did you do! 」

「 As you can see, I waved my weapon. Like this, swoosh. 」

The chain was flourished as to show the fundou at the end of the chain.

「 As expected, if shown often, countermeasures can be prepared. Was I overconfident? However, there was no choice, it had to end. 」

Not just the fundou, the sickle section of the kusarigama was thrown, twining around Strauss's shaking arm, the sickle section embedded itself at the right shoulder.

Strauss lowered the dagger, Hifumi approached slowly and cautiously.

「 The wind can be blown in various directions, but the practical scope of using it is quite narrow. In the Marquis's estate, Pajou's shoulder had a shallow cut. Some time ago as well, not even the painting was sliced completely. Though the wind blades blowing may look frightening, the reality is that the opponent cannot be killed unless cut at

the neck. 」

The true nature of Strauss' magic was seen through he was panicking while holding the dagger in his left hand. In addition he began to chant, but Hifumi was already in front of him.

「Too slow. 」

Strauss got kicked in the face and rolled over to the hallway.

You could see he had a nosebleed and was fainting in agony, then a woman's scream was heard.

「The magic my Origa uses can attack and carve out a desk from the floor. The speed of the attack is much faster」

He thumbed the guard of his Katana so it would be easier to draw.

「 I think there is some good prospects in your body movement, but it is still impossible for you to stand before me.」

Hifumi slashed Strauss with a quickdraw while he was trying to get up.

Stepping forward firmly with his right foot, a sound was heard as Strauss's head began to fall from the torso.

In the hallway, there was a housemaid who witnessed the instance of murder, unable to move out of shock.

「 Hii-! 」

Frightened at seeing Hifumi approaching, she moved back, trying to escape unsuccessfully.

Sorry about that. Can you stand? 」

Afraid of being touched again, stopping at a suitable distance.

「 Gather everyone else in the hall. 」

「 This…… Yes, Un-Understood! 」

Standing up, the maid unsteadily ran to carry out Hifumi's instructions.

Shouldering the unconscious Hagenti and returning to his seat in the dining room, a little less than 30 minutes has lapsed since he'd left.

Though he had settled the entire matter alone, he anticipated what they were going to say.

「 There's the scent of a woman on you. What were you doing? 」

Hearing Origa's first words, he slipped.

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Chapter 18 – New Divide

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Hifumi dropped Hagenti onto the floor, sat down and ordered tea from the waiter who was wearing a rather strained expression.

「 V-Viscount Hagenti….. 」(Sabnak)

Seeing Hifumi casually toss the Viscount on the floor, Sabnak was speechless.

「 Did you kill him? 」

「 No, he's just stunned. 」

「 Is that so. 」

Seeing that Hifumi did not see the situation as out of the ordinary, Sabnak couldn't help but tremble.

The two women didn't think Hifumi's abduction of the Viscount in such a short time as wondrous. At this point, Sabnak completely understood the Princess' instructions of "Do not defy. "

「 Then, is your discussion finished? 」

「 To hell with that, what happened to Viscount Hagenti?! 」

「 Ah, I entered through the second floor window, killed the magician who was present and brought him. 」

Sabnak was unable to digest the answer.

Disregarding Sabnak's lost expression, Hifumi explained.

「 ……Hm, that dagger wielding magician seems to be from the country Horant. 」

「 Pajou said something like that as well. 」

「 I have heard that the magicians from Horant do not use staffs, but daggers specially processed with magic as a medium. 」

Hifumi recalled that he had not learned about this country and its neighbours.

I will have Origa and Kasha teach me about it tonight, no, now that this Knight is here, listening here is also fine. (Hifumi)

A man comfortably sitting and thinking, and a man in a daze; lying next to them, a tied up noble. Two women, discussing what to do about Hagenti. Unable to process what happened, the waiter took as much distance as possible and turned his gaze away.

「So, Before we get back to the story; about Hagenti. Do you want to kill him? Or hand him over to Sabnak?」

Hifumi wanted to eat something sweet, so he ordered something from the waiter, who brought him a peach like fruit to eat, and started listening to them once more.

…….So cute (Origa)

Origa thought secretly, watching Hifumi peel and eat the fruit bit by bit to avoid getting his hands dirty.

Kasha memorised the sight, different from the way her master usually ate.

「 Well, what is it then?」

「 Our enmity is with the merchant Beirevura. If you obtain information that leads to him, killing this man specifically is unnecessary. 」

Of course, Origa spoke after taking her master's permission.

「 Fuuun~ 」

「Would you give me custody of Hagenti himself? 」

Requesting earnestly, Sabnak bowed down once again. Hifumi accepted the request after he confirmed that there was no hesitation in Origa and Kasha's eyes.

「I, I'm really thankful! 」

「Instead of saying that, I want you to arrange a little something for me. You can think of it as compensation for my work.」

After Hifumi finished eating the fruit, he prompted Sabnak to sit down and held up three fingers.

「 First, since the remaining soldiers rushed to the city gates to control the situation, I'm going to massacre them. I want a cleanup crew. Second, there are two dead bodies in the 2nd floor of the Viscount's mansion that I left behind so, let me see…… 」

「 Master, is it in regards the magician from Horant? 」

「 Yes, I killed the magician and just left the body there. I want you to investigate him, because I saw that guy at the Marquis' mansion, Pajou too. 」

Sabnak wrote down Hifumi's demands on a piece of parchment. While writing the name 'Strauss', he remembered having seen the name before. Though Pajou's arm had been injured in the event, it had led to evidence of the Marquis's smuggling operation; this was a well known fact within the Third Knight Corps.

No wonder, he was involved in that matter. I thought it was strange that the observing Pajou-senpai would be so valiant in those circumstances. (Sabnak)

A vivid image of Hifumi charging the Marquis's estate while dressed as a senior Knight suddenly rose up in Sabnak's mind. He heaved a sigh of relief at it not being the case at the Viscount's estate.

「 And the third…..? 」

「 Tell me everything the Third Knight Corps knows about the state of affairs in this country and the neighbouring one. It will be necessary to do so before going to Vichy. 」

「 ……Um, to what extent? 」

「 Everything. I had planned to travel carefreely and gather intelligence while touring the countries directly, but this seems to have become quite complicated. 」

Seeing Hifumi sigh while shaking his head, Sabnak resigned himself to simply accepting all this.

「 To tell the truth, I wanted to arrest the Viscount a little more smartly and secretly get things going in the background but……. Can't be helped, would you be willing to stay in town for a few days while I call for support? 」

「 Hmm, in that time you can give me all the information you have on…..Ah! 」

「 Master? What's wrong? 」

「 I told the Viscount's servants to gather in the hall….. 」

Seeing Hifumi's chagrined expression, Origa let slip a chuckle and turned to Sabnak.

「 Sabnak, could you go to the Viscount's estate in place of Master? 」

「 Eh, me? 」

「 Indeed, because if master goes, everyone is likely to be scared shitless. 」

Kasha agreed with Origa's proposal.

The annoyed Hifumi insisted that he had been gentle with the non-adversary maid, but no one believed him.

「 Got it, I will go. At any rate, putting the town in order is necessary. 」

「 Sorry about that.」

Hifumi smoothly inclined his head at Sabnak who had stood up.

「 N-No, this too is my job! 」

「 Then, while Sabnak is going to the estate, are there other soldiers that need to be dealt with? 」

In the end, we still came back to a topic that reeks of blood. (Sabnak)

Separating from Sabnak, Hifumi and the two returned to the town entrance. Five soldiers were cleaning up the corpses.

Coming to a halt a suitable distance away, Hifumi observed the working soldiers.

「 What do you think? 」

「 Kasha and I, just the two of us are enough to kill them with room to spare. 」(Origa)

……. I intended to ask them whether they wanted to kill or arrest, but… (Hifumi)

Was this girl always capable of such brutality? Hifumi was more concerned about her, conveniently blind to his own character.

「 Well then, I'll leave it to you. 」

「 Leave it to us. 」(Origa)

「 Yoshi! 」(Kasha)

Seeing off the fired-up duo and watching them run towards the soldiers, Hifumi contemplated on how to deal with slaves.

「 Is this event beneficial as well, I wonder? 」

His calm eyes reflected the tragedy orchestrated by the two girls.

Several days after the event, Sabnak worked tirelessly; putting out an urgent request to the town guard to monitor the comings and goings of adventurers, and cleaning of the blood and bodies was begun under the command of the temporary acting lord of the area.

Moreover, time flew when Hifumi visited the Viscount's estate everyday to ask Sabnak something or the other.

When Hifumi arrived, Kasha and Origa trained in the garden of the mansion, the employed servants were worried.

「 If I say not to come, would they refrain from training on the premises….? 」 (Sabnak)

「 Don't twist your words. If you're worried, say what you want to say directly.」 (Hifumi)

「 Twist my words…… They are your slaves,yes? 」

「 Even if that's the case, without explicit instruction, they move yes? Telling them each and every move is tiresome. Anyway, because of the fights in town recently, I told them to let their hair down. 」

Fondness could be heard in Hifumi's voice.

Seeing his tender expression that contrasted with his everyday behaviour, and remembering his cheerful slaughtering of people, instead of amusement, Sabnak felt fear. He had never seen such a warped and selfish individual like this before.

「 The slaves adore you. 」

「 I think I'd use a different word. Come now, continue your instruction. 」

Seeing Hifumi's expression while opening the map, Sabnak was moved by his desire to learn and unintentionally smiled.

The kingdom of Orsongrande, as the name implied, was ruled by nobles in a model similar to the feudal system. It varied in different places depending on the nobles in charge. Apart from the amount that had to be paid to the kingdom, it could be freely set by the lord of the area.

Though each lord had their own territorial army in addition to the Imperial army, in terms of both financial power and military forces, the Imperial family had overwhelming influence. Civil war did not seem to be a concern presently.

Only the northern side of the country faced the sea, it touched borders with other countries on the eastern, western and southern sides.

To the east was the merchant country, Vichy. The country was run by a parliamentary system in which several city-states were represented by representatives in an assembly. Being called the merchant country, the country itself sold metal and manufactured goods in neighbouring countries, the profit formed a large part of the national budget. As a result, many city-states promoted commerce and industry. Incidentally, good quality metal could be excavated from it's southern mountainous area. A lot of dwarves lived there, so as to exchange and trade commodities made

by the dwarves, it was a definite plus point.

The western side did not exactly have a clearly defined border, the vast mountainous region was filled with wilderness over which were spread many beastmen villages. The custom of farming being nonexistent, it was said they lived off hunting, but no details were known. Humans weren't interested, simply avoiding the race as a whole. While Hifumi had heard they were "hostile to humans" when princess Imeraria had summoned him to "Fight the demi-humans", Sabnak had a different story to tell. Orsongrande one-sidedly invaded to get more land and were hit hard by the guerilla warfare used against them, became impoverished and withdrew.

「 What a nonsensical affair. 」

「 Beyond the beastmen land, there is a country known as the Knight country, they too want the land in question. After all, in the mountainous and wild areas, ores and crystals can potentially be mined. Currently we have no choice but to one-sidedly buy them from Vichy. To escape from this miserable state of affairs, the King seemed to have thought that that land was necessary.」

In a past story, the prince who succeeded did not have appropriate judgement either, instead, the princess ruling the country now did not seem to be interested in the conquest any more, thought the Knights.

「 The south? 」

「 The magic country, Horant. 」

A genius magician in Horant gathered apprentices to train and research for the country. Most of the magic tools produced by Vichy are designed by Horant. Also, making use of weapons like daggers as a magic wand is known to some magicians, but the production methods are not released by Vichy.

On the west of Horant, sharing only a little bit of border with Orsongrande, is the country of elves.

「 Elves! Elves exist! 」

「 …… Uh, yes. They exist, but meeting them is unlikely. 」

It is said that most of the elves' country is heavily forested, and the elves live quietly in the depths of the forest, not interacting with other countries. Any stranger entering the forest is immediately attacked mercilessly; Orsongrande and Horant have tried several times to subjugate some of the forest, to no avail. Unfamiliar to forest warfare, with arrows unexpectedly flying in from the shadows among the trees, even the magicians could not fight properly, and had to retreat numerous times.

「 For the time being, these are the state of affairs of our country and it's neighbours. 」(Sabnak)

「 You saved my time. Thanks. 」

「 Ah, apart from that, could you come here tomorrow? 」

Listening to the tired-out Sabnak's reason, Hifumi smiled and stood up.

「 At last reinforcements have come from the capital. It seems that Pajou senpai will be here as well. Regarding the man called Strauss, I believe she will give you the information directly. 」

「 Is that so….. Very well. 」

「 Gothras escaped. 」

Pajou, who seemed to have ridden in considerable haste, found Hifumi in the Viscount's mansion. Out of breath, she cut her greetings short and explained the situation.

According to Pajou's explanation, Gothras, who was awaiting punishment in the Knight Corps' prison, had killed a guard and disappeared.

「The Knight who was guarding him, his neck was snapped. The prison bars were bent, a feat of strength impossible for a human.」

However, Pajou's place was broken into, and the report related to Hifumi was stolen. Gothras could not be working alone, he had to be receiving some guidance, was the conclusion the Knight Corps reached.

「We believe that someone helped Gothras escape.」

Regaining her breath, Pajou finished reporting and straightened her spine. She bowed deeply to Hifumi.

「This incident was completely our blunder. You painstakingly gave us an opportunity to clear up our mismanagement, we not only wasted it, but as a result you are deprived of information. The responsibility is mine.」

Seeing her apologising with her head bowed and not moving an inch, Hifumi laughed.

「The apology is unnecessary. Even if the information is concealed, sometime, somewhere, it will be revealed. Besides, there might be a guy holding enough power to bend prison bars, yes?」

Looking up, Pajou's eyes met a cold smile, the same one she saw at the Marquis' estate. A chill went up her spine.

「Ah, joy. A fellow confident in their physical prowess, there's this technique I really want to try out….」

Everyone froze seeing the expression of warped joy on Hifumi's face.

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Chapter 19 – Know your Enemy

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Hifumi had previously bought some magical tools that functioned like lamps. Separating from Pajou and heading back to the hotel, Hifumi continued learning his letters from Origa after dinner. Since he had made this a habit after coming to the town, he had a general grasp of the basic letters and their readings.

Incidentally, the magical illumination tool was at a great buy, being better than a candle. He bought a total of five pieces; one each was given to Origa and Kasha at the hotel.

The tutoring went somewhat like this: the letters were read aloud so so as to grasp their pronunciation. They were written in a horizontal fashion and repeated them aloud while writing helped memorising them.

Since constant repetition was a shortcut, though this method used up a lot of expensive parchment, Hifumi bought it regardless.

「 Master, is upto here sufficient today? 」

「 Hm, I understand the general characters and pronunciations from this. No words or grammar right now. If necessary, I will ask later. 」

「 Please leave it to me. Seeing master's speed, it won't take too much time. 」

Kasha was carrying out her weapon maintenance during her free time. She watched the two get along quickly and felt a little lonely.

Should I mingle more with Hifumi? thought Kasha, but she didn't want to disturb Origa.

While Kasha was pondering these deep thoughts, all the while cleaning nonexistent marks on her sword, Hifumi had cleared up his study material and stood up.

「 Because of Pajou's troublesome state of affairs, we have to enter Vichy tomorrow. Since we're taking the carriage, I'll have to ask you two to be the coachmen again. 」

「 Understood. 」 (Kasha)

「 Of course. 」 (Origa)

Hifumi nodded at their responses and retired to his room after breakfast.

Origa waited until the door to their room was completely closed and undressed facing her bed. A flimsy dress of rather thin material covered her slim body. Though it was usual for Origa to sleep like this, Kasha vaguely noticed her figure.

Slender arms and legs. She really does give off a "womanly" impression. (Kasha)

Understanding her master's kind treatment, Kasha sighed and tensed, gazing at her own arms and legs.

She sighed again.

「 What's wrong? 」

「 It's nothing. We have to leave early tomorrow, go to sleep. We're travelling with master, so it's definitely going to be a turbulent day. 」

Origa laughed gently in agreement and turned off the illumination tool.

The next morning, Sabnak was at the gate that faced Vichy to see off the trio.

A thin fog had come out, softening the morning light.

Though Sabnak was pleased at the arrival of the reinforcements, since all the Knights that came along were senior to him, the paperwork had not decreased even though he had an attendant helping him. The dark circles under his eyes kept thickening.

A man riding a horse and a carriage came from the direction of the hotel.

「 Good morning. Something wrong?」

「 Just seeing you off. From here, continue along the highway for two hours till you reach the stronghold at the border. Since there are troops on both the Orsongrande and the Vichy side, please show the permit to both. 」

「 Got it. Well then, see you. 」

Hifumi continued on, the horse-drawn carriage followed slowly in his wake, both slowly vanished into the mist covering the highway.

Sabnak continued staring for a while at the spot where they disappeared. Pajou's voice rang out from behind him.

「 Hifumi-san? 」

「 Now it's possible to leave this place…. Something wrong? 」 (Sabnak)

「 It's the incident of the magician from Horant, the one called Strauss. The analysis of his body, except for the dagger, there was no indication of high social standing. However… 」

Visibly penetrating Strauss' chest was a magic tool, possibly of an evil goal.

Based on the build of the body, it seemed more than 50 years old and considerably thin. The movements displayed in the Marquis' mansion, as heard from Hifumi were hard to believe. Though not completely clear, it may have been a body strengthening type evil magic, surmised Pajou.

「 The corpse can be sent to the capital today for further investigation. 」

「 Body strengthening magic….. Could it be, the one that set Gothras free was Strauss? 」

「 No, the timings are wrong. 」

「 Then how… 」

「 Gothras might have used a similar magic tool, but he was frisked before being put into prison. Did someone pass it to him for him to escape? ….. In any case, it is necessary to search within the royal capital for this possible accomplice. 」

Even as she said this, Pajou was at her wit's end to even start looking for clues.

As the carriage rolled on in a leisurely manner, the fog gradually cleared up. The stronghold on the edge of the road came into view.

Seeing that the so-called demon seemed to have left already, Hifumi felt let down.

「 That's the border? 」

There were no walls or fences or such, the highway just ended at a 2-storey stronghold. Both sides had just one large building each, nothing else.

According to Kasha's explanation, if one left the highway, they are immediately attacked by monsters. As a result, it was unnecessary to build walls.

The central building functioned as a checkpoint for both countries. The large buildings on each side housed their respective border security soldiers. According to a treaty, 10 soldiers from each country could be assigned there.

Seeing the stronghold come into view, Hifumi had an uneasy feeling.

「 …… It's too quiet. I can't feel any indications of a single person inside, much less 20. 」

「 Eh? 」

「 Arm yourselves immediately. I smell blood. 」

Kasha and Origa did not understand, but believing in Hifumi, did so instantly. Their reactions were a result of constant training.

The carriage was stored, horses were dismounted.

Drawing nearer cautiously, several soldiers were visible on the ground in front of the stronghold.

The trio did not rush forward, carefully approaching the bodies.

「 This…. 」

Seeing the state of affairs, Kasha gnashed her teeth.

An inspection of the path leading to the stronghold showed soldiers lying dead everywhere on the stone pavement. At first glance, it was obvious that their limbs were pointing in strange directions, completely motionless.

Amongst the bodies, some limbs were cruelly ripped off, exposing a gruesome sight.

「 Everyone…. Dead? 」

「 No, one person is alive. 」

Smoothly moving among the corpses, Hifumi crossed the border and crouched down near a fallen soldier.

「 Oy, get up. 」

A young woman, a soldier from Vichy, judging from the armour, lay facedown on the ground completely unresponsive. She had disheveled red hair in a berry cut.

「As expected, she's dead. Master?」

「No, this fellow is uninjured.」

While saying that, Hifumi took the woman's wrist and jabbed his finger at a vital point located on the thumb side of the wrist.

「Adadadadada!?」

The female soldier jumped up because of the sudden acute pain, with teary eyes put some distance between her and Hifumi.

That agile movement was similar to a cat, but the teary-eyed wrist-rubbing didn't improve the impression.

「Why did it fail??」

「I know if you're dead or not even if I can't see you.」

「That doesn't explain anything!」

「I wasn't explaining.」

To Hifumi's cold response, the female soldier clenched her teeth and placed her hand over a sword at her hip.

She made to draw her sword, but Hifumi was much faster. Instantly, Hifumi's katana was pointed at her grey left eye.

「I have questions. Explain this situation. You die if not.」

「…… Understood.」

The girl, Alyssa, was an inspection official of Vichy. There seemed to be a constant number of women soldiers on the border.

「This happened a little while ago. A powerful man suddenly started acting violently. The soldiers here and Orsongrande's too were instantly killed. I managed to survive because I played dead when a colleague was thrown against me and I fell.」

Noticing that Alyssa spoke with a strangely lovely voice for a soldier, Hifumi assessed Alyssa with an expressionless gaze. Seeing he did not so much as raise an eyebrow at the mention of the Orsongrande soldiers being killed, Alyssa pouted.

「Though your colleagues have died, you don't seem to be affected.」 (Alyssa)

「Doesn't matter. Leave that, what about the violent and powerful man?」

「That one.」

Hifumi turned his gaze to a tall man grasping a thick bludgeon, collapsed on the ground.

「Who killed him?」

「I don't know, while playing dead I had my eyes closed. However once everyones voices died out, I heard someone's footsteps approaching. I heard a voice say "Still lack control" and then the footsteps faded away. I saw neither the face nor the form.」

「I see. Origa, Kasha. Return to the town by horse and bring Pajou.」

「 Understood. 」

Seeing Hifumi see the two off, Alyssa asked timidly,

「 Um…. the sword, could you-」

She stopped mid-sentence when Hifumi returned his katana to it's sheath.

「 Th-thank you.. 」

「 If you have time to thank me, you have time to run. 」

「 Fue?! 」

Alyssa tilted her head in confusion on seeing him disregard her. Hifumi returned his katana to storage, replacing it with the kusarigama.

「 Wh-what….. 」

As Alyssa muttered that, the atmosphere grew heavy. A shadow rushed out from the stronghold towards Hifumi, with the intent to strike.

It was the escaped Gothras.

「 In the past few days you've become considerably sickening. 」

Hifumi sneered, easily avoiding the incoming fist.

Gothras' appearance was very dirty, to the extent that one would not think he was a former Knight. A body bulging with swelled up muscles, drool dribbling down a face twisted in pain.

He grasped a weapon tightly, blood dripping from the fists.

「 Kill…. KILL… 」

「 He's lost his sanity huh. How boring. 」

While saying this, Hifumi had thrown the counterweight of the kusarigama, capturing Gothras' arm. Faced with the abnormal strength pulling the kusarigama, Hifumi easily let go of it.

「 Hm, brute force huh. Pretty good. 」

「 B-but the weapon! 」

Alyssa yelled at the carefree Hifumi's back.

Facing Gothras' barehanded second strike, Hifumi too was empty handed.

A simple head movement dodged the fist to the face. An elbow met the fist.

Bones were definitely broken, but Gothras continued his strikes without hesitation.

「 No sense of pain either eh. 」

Stepping some distance away in consideration for his opponent, Hifumi was wearing a huge grin.

Seeing that, Gothras attacked furiously, shouting incoherently.

A few palm strikes to Gothras' sides broke his ribs. Just that alone did not stop him, but a well-placed kick to the broken ribs did the trick. Gothras' movements noticeably slowed and he was throwing up blood, his internal organs seemed to have been damaged.

「 Pain and fear are valuable sensations. This guy has lost them, he's a boring opponent now. 」

Gothras's throat was crushed, courtesy a finger strike from Hifumi, a two-fingered strike to the eyes immediately followed. The onslaught was complete with a pulverizing kick to the now-prone Gothras's chest.

Gothras trembled for an instant, his movements then stilled permanently.

「 …… Amazing 」

Alyssa was unable to take her eyes off Hifumi.

Pajou and Sabnak arrived with Origa and Kasha just as Gothras died.

It seemed that a sentry in Fukaroru had seen someone resembling Gothras heading towards the border, and the report had made it's way to Pajou. Eventually, they had given chase, but overtaking a single fugitive was impossible on the highway.

「 This…… Sabnak, return immediately and bring soldiers immediately for emergency border security. And then send a report to the capital about this incident. 」

「 Roger. 」

Receiving Pajou's backing, Sabnak turned back immediately.

Hifumi briefly told her the situation, Pajou approached Gothras' corpse to inspect his equipment.

「 As expected, Hifumi-san is proactive…… In any case, this is a completely changed form of Gothras…. This is..! 」

On tearing off Gothras' shirt, there was a tool resembling the one on Strauss' chest. However, the shape was a little different from Strauss'. There was a portion that had collapsed, a result of Hifumi's pulverising kick.

「 This thing, was it the cause? 」 (Hifumi)

「 I fear that is so, there was something similar on Strauss' chest as well. 」

「 In that case, there may be something like that there. 」

Hifumi was pointing at the corpse of the large man who was acting violently earlier.

While Pajou was looking at Gothras' corpse, Hifumi observed the large man's body. A magic tool similar to that of Strauss and Gothras was slightly ensconced in the chest area.

In front of everyone, a hand was thrust into the large man's chest.

「 Uee~…. 」

Alyssa unintentionally squeaked, unable to look away.

「 Wh-what are you doing? 」

Kasha asked timidly, Hifumi wiped his hand on the large man's clothes and answered,

「A thought came to mind. There is a wound reaching his heart. My strike was not the cause of death.」

Hifumi turned his gaze to Pajou.

「Judging by the shape and depth of the wound, It's probably a weapon like Strauss had, similar to the size of that dagger he had….」

Origa brought a cloth soaked in water from a nearby well for Hifumi to wipe his hand on.

「Besides, Alyssa, this man seems to be an official from your side.」

「Ueh? H-how….」

「That fellow's clothes have the same seal engraved in the handle of your sword. They are issue-only goods, yes?」

「That is….」

「If you simply think about it, people from Horant have slipped into both Orsongrande and Vichy for something, wouldn't you agree?」

Listening to his conclusion and the question that came to light, Alyssa and Pajou both began to understand the sheer weight behind it.

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Chapter 20 – Like Toy Soldiers

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Completely disregarding the silent Pajou and the Orsongrande Knights, and the equally silent Alyssa from Vichy, Hifumi called out to Origa and Kasha.
「 Well then, let's get a move on. 」
Saying so, Hifumi turned towards the horses, only to be stopped by a panicking Alyssa.
「 W-wait a minute! You're leaving just like that? 」
An over-the-shoulder drawl came back,
「 Aa? I really don't care about discussions. I was attacked, I responded. That's it. 」
「 Don't mind him, he's just like that…. You're from Vichy, yes? I am a Knight from Orsongrande, Pajou. And you? 」
「 Ah, I am Alyssa. That is, I don't particularly have a title…. 」 [TN: she uses the male informal 'boku' here]
Noting the difference in status between them, Alyssa unintentionally shrank and spoke timidly.
Pajou laughed elegantly, extending her right hand.
「 I'm pleased you were able to survive the incident. 」
As they shook hands, Alyssa composed herself.
Somehow, she gives off the feeling of an adult woman… (Alyssa)
「 Well then, let us speak of what to do after this. We will be acting as immigration control for our country until order is restored. Since the criminal was related to our country, please let us collect his and our soldier's bodies. 」
「 Aah, y-yes. 」
Alyssa inadvertently agreed to Pajou's smooth and flowing speech.
Originally, the Vichy side should be documenting the bodies and damage, becoming important in their investigations. Moreover, the scene of the crime was on the Vichy side, thereby falling under Vichy's jurisdiction, no matter the involved parties.
Alyssa was definitely not going to avoid a penalty for this.

While waiting for Hifumi, Origa overheard the conversation. She gazed at Alyssa with pity in her gaze, Alyssa seemed to not have noticed the predicament she was in.

The poor girl…. (Origa)
Seeing that Pajou had skilfully monopolized the investigation with some underhanded methods, she chuckled to herself.
Entering Vichy would not be a nice event. The other side's Knights would be the source of plenty of problems.
In any case, Pajou was relieved that no more complex situations would crop up.
「 Anyway, Alyssa-san, isn't there going to be assistance from Vichy? 」
「 That's right! Ah, but…… it's impossible, there's no one on the Vichy side but me. 」
Seals and signatures of approval are necessary from both sides for merchants and travellers to cross boundaries. In case either of them are missing, it is considered as an illegal entry into the country.
Of course, there is the aspect of national defence too, evacuating the place is a problem.

The Vichy side had been completely annihilated, leaving no available means of communication. Hifumi returned on horseback to where Alyssa was contemplating further actions.

「 Pajou, take care of the departure formalities. 」
Hifumi passed her the documents; Pajou took them and affixed the necessary seals and signatures on it.
Meanwhile, the corpse of the soldier had been dragged over.
「 Ne, ne~.. 」
Alyssa called out to the waiting Hifumi without hesitation.
「 What? 」
「 I have a small request… 」
Alyssa asked Hifumi to relay a message to the first guardroom they saw on the highway after entering Vichy.
「 Please convey the current situation and inform that I am requesting reinforcements. 」
Hifumi considered for a moment, then nodded.
「 However, you will have to tell me about the town in Vichy. 」
「 Great! Thank you! 」
Entirely believing Hifumi's made-up reason of sightseeing a large town, Alyssa happily gave them a detailed explanation.
「 So the capital city can be reached in about 10 days via carriage? 」
Alyssa replied to Origa's question with a smile.
「 That's right. From here, you can go to the capital, the highway passes near the Horant border in a wide curve. 」
「 Hee, the road passes by Horant, the place from where those evil magic tools came from. 」
While Kasha was smirking, Hifumi voiced a question.
「 Hm? Orsongrande and Horant's borders also touch, did you take a deliberate detour? 」
To his question, Pajou explained.
Originally, when the genius magician established Horant as independent, a considerable part of Orsongrande was invaded. As a result, there were a few skirmishes and now there is little interaction between the two.
「 Alyssa-san, I have a request. 」
「 Ah, I understand. 」
Alyssa received and cleared Hifumi's travel pass and Pajou continued,
「 Therefore, if a magician from Horant 'lawfully' enters, there is a possibility of obtaining formal permission to leave Vishy as well. 」
With someone from Vichy as a guide, and with the formal approval of Viscount Hagenti, it is possible to enter Orsongrande freely.
Therefore, though unable to discern at what level, there might be someone with power in Vichy connected to Horant in no small way, Pajou surmised.
「 Now that you mention it, it is highly likely that someone is behind Beirevra. 」
Though complicated in various ways, Hifumi is troublesome, but not irresponsible so as to decline the request that requires leaving the country.
「 Well then, in any case he's entering Vichy to take in various sights. 」

Hifumi, who had collected the permit from Alyssa announced their departure to Origa and Kasha.

They advanced along the highway, reaching the town called Aroseru by carriage in about 2 hours.
As per Alyssa's explanation, a town enclosed by a wall came into view. Being close to the border, it seemed to be made in a similar fashion as Fukaroru in Orsongrande.
「 Somehow, it does not look too different from our country 」 (Kasha)
Hifumi had a similar impression to Kasha. Was it because they were close by? Culturally there seemed to be no difference. To be frank, the food in Orsongrande was all right, but he had concerns about the food in Vichy. Then again, being close to Fukaroru, it would probably not be a problem.
While showing the permit at the entrance of the town, the soldiers there directed him to their in-charge in the guardroom.
「 Surprisingly undefended. Or, how should I put it, the gatekeeper had a strangely mechanical vibe. 」
「 Mechanical? 」

「 No emotional ups or downs are visible. Just like repeating a fixed motion. 」
「 Ah, but aren't serious soldiers supposed to be like that? 」
「 …. Not quite… 」
Though somewhat cautious, it couldn't be helped so Hifumi entered the guardroom. He displayed the coin denoting his peerage to the person in-charge.
A man in simple armour of medium height and build came out of the interior, and looking straight at Hifumi asked what business he had.
His eyes were unfocused.
「 A soldier called Alyssa asked me to pass on a message. 」
Hifumi explained that all the soldiers at the border post have been killed, apart from Alyssa. When he explained that immediate assistance was required, the man thanked him for his cooperation in a smooth voice without looking the slightest bit thankful.
「 Are you staying here today? Have you decided on a hotel? 」
「 We are staying here, yes, but the hotel has not been decided. 」
「 Then if you head towards the interior of the town, there is a hotel with nice and clean rooms. There isn't another suitable for a noble to live in. 」
「 Is that so? We'll do that then. 」
Though slightly wary of the man's appearance, Hifumi decided to go along with it.
「 Then, we must be going to the border post, please excuse me. 」
With a perfunctory bow to Hifumi, the man left along with a subordinate.

「 Somehow the reaction of the in-charge and the soldiers at the gate seemed a little strange. 」
Origa peevishly stated that she thought they were quite impolite to her master, a noble.
「 I've seen someone in a similar state before….. where was it? 」 (Hifumi)
「 After all, like in Fukaroru, are the people here planning a dirty trick too? 」(Origa)

While they were taking, they reached the hotel. Since Hifumi had learnt the written characters, he could recognise the name.
「 Here? 」
The horses were tethered outside,they pushed open the wooden door and went in. There was a small counter in what appeared to be a spacious dining hall.
「 Welcome! 10 silver coins for one room for a night. There are 17 double rooms. There is no room to put 3 or more people in one. 3 silver coins per horse. They will be moved to the stable in the back. 」
There was an old man with an unsociable expression on his face sitting at the counter.
「 One single room, my companions will take a double room. 」
After depositing a pile of silver coins on the counter, the old man took out 2 keys from under the counter.
「 This is for the single room, this one is for the double room. The second floor is entirely guest rooms. Dinner will be prepared before nightfall, and served in this hall. 」
The old man fell silent after telling them the necessary information and writing down the key numbers.
Taking the key, the trio went up to the 2nd floor.
「 Lie down a bit before dinner. We may have to move at night. 」
「 Is something going to happen? 」
「 After the group confirms the situation at the border, some will return to report. By that time it will most likely be night. If we have to move, it will be then. 」
After a light lunch, it was decided that they would rest and after dinner, observe the street from their rooms.
「 Our opponents will not be simpletons without strategies like Alyssa. 」
Hifumi entered his room immediately after saying that.

Kasha shook her head resignedly while Origa laughed.
「 But I think it's a good thing that we can even randomly look a little for Beirevra. 」

Origa entered the room while Kasha followed, lost in thought.

「 ……. Those fellows are easy to understand. 」
On the second floor of the hotel, Hifumi murmured, lying in wait. The room was pitch-dark.
Several armoured men passed by on the street after darkness fell and pedestrian traffic declined.
Hifumi, who had completely acclimated his sight to the darkness saw it clearly. With hands bound behind the back, a diminutive shadow was visible walking unsteadily between two men. When they passed by the front of the hotel, it was clear the person was Alyssa.
Badly beaten up, left cheek swelled and dried streams of blood coming from the mouth.
It seems they have been walking for a long time, and occasionally her foot slowed, only to receive a kick from behind every time to forcibly advance.
Watching the sorry situation, Origa and Kasha both murmured “How cruel”.
「 Taking her to a spot different from this afternoon’s guardroom. Well now, what to do, I wonder… 」
「 Why was Alyssa arrested? A soldier from their own country…. 」
Though her face was not visible, the speech pattern and voice identified the speaker as Origa.
「 She was the only one who survived the scene of the crime, could that be it? 」(Hifumi)
「 But why not make the most of it? Or could it be a chance to bump off the eyewitness who knows what happened? 」
「 It would be to confirm what the witness knows and to keep secrets that may get someone else into trouble. Torture, drugs…. Drugs? 」(Hifumi)
Hifumi remembered the state of the soldier when they came into the town.
「 That’s it, drugs! If I remember correctly, there were drugs to stabilise the mind and if addicted, it leads to a state of losing emotions. Similar to the fellow who had that magic tool attached to him… 」
Guessing and putting his thoughts in order, Hifumi suddenly raised his head.
「 Is something the matter? 」
「 Do you need to wear armour? It seems that they are also attempting to capture us. Around 10 people are coming towards the hotel. 」
「 Fight here? I’ll pull out the lighting magic tool…. 」
「 No, no need. Before that, I’ll need to find Alyssa, she does not seem to be too far. 」
「 Eeh!? 」
「 Kasha, why are you so surprised? 」
「 No, saving a girl while enemies are coming, it does not sound like master…. 」
Seeing Kasha honestly surprised, Hifumi thought it quite vexing that his reputation was that bad.
「 I said a while ago that I was not a homicidal maniac. What Alyssa knows and may hear in the future may be valuable information. Besides, 10 people isn’t bad for a warm-up, and you two have not been instructed on how to fight in the dark. In any case, we’ll meet guys like these again. At that time, kill them well. 」
Kasha was relieved when Hifumi mentioned killing.
Apparently Origa too, from her relieved expression and a quietly muttered 「 As expected from master. 」
They aren’t making fun of me are they? (Hifumi)
Mulling over those doubts, Hifumi quickly pulled out his kusarigama, stuck it in the roof and quietly climbed up.
While Kasha and Origa were staring at the swinging chain, they heard Hifumi’s voice from above.
「 Grab the chain and climb up. One at a time. 」
Though scared, they somehow managed to get onto the roof. The door of the room opened. It seemed that the landlord had a key.
「 ….. Escaped huh. 」
It was the voice of the person in-charge at the town gate. After noises that indicated searching for a while, they left.
In the dark of the night, the soldiers left in the same direction Alyssa was taken.

Hifumi stood on the roof smiling, pleased at having a new prey.

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Chapter 21 – Shining Star

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“As for battle during the night, generally speaking it is important that you are not discovered by your opponent.” (Hifumi)

Atop the roof while watching the retreating soldiers, Hifumi explained to Origa and Kasha before starting to act.

In the moonlight, Origa’s group could vaguely see the stature of Hifumi but not his facial expression.

“Be aware of the location where the light won’t shine on you. Erase your presence. And then, without making a sound, kill. Take care that you don’t hit on metal with the hamono. Don’t give your opponent the chance to yell. Make sure the corpse drops silently.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi explained the necessary movement to draw a walking person towards your own direction and also how to use the hamono while affixing the katana to his waist.

“Properly use the palm at the time of covering their mouth. Fingers and the arm can be bitten. Shut their nose since people can still scream through their nose.” (Hifumi)

Suddenly being unable to breathe, only that is already plenty to cause chaos, Hifumi said.

“Well then, let’s go!” (Hifumi)

“Ano … how do you plan to get down?” (Origa)

Their current location was at the rooftop of a two-storied building.

Origa was scared as she peered down on the dark road surface.

“At only such a height, you jump down, no?” (Hifumi)

“… This height is a bit …” (Origa)

“Me too, it’s impossible, I think …” (Kasha)

“Guess it can’t be helped. I will catch you, so jump down in order.” (Hifumi)

Without waiting for an answer, Hifumi nimbly descended into the darkness.

“Come down …” (Hifumi)

“… Alright, Kasha I will go first.” (Origa)

Timidly peering down while confirming Hifumi’s location, Origa held her breath and jumped off the roof.

After seeing her off, Kasha’s ears caught a small shriek from below which confirmed that she had likely been caught safely.

“Since Origa is light, it’s fine, but …” (Kasha)

Kasha looked down at the gear she was wearing.

A metal armor and two swords, and although she didn’t think her own weight was overly much, adding it together with the equipment she was certainly quite heavy.

Even so, she was reluctant to stay on the rooftop as is.

She knew there was no time either.

Although they were soldiers from another country, that small girl might still be tortured right at this moment.

Or if they were too late, she could possibly be killed.

Thinking of it that way, it was foolish to falter for such a reason, thus Kasha resolved herself.

“Master, I believe in you.” (Kasha)

Though it looked like she was preparing to run away, Kasha finally jumped down as well.

Hifumi skillfully caught the falling Kasha sideways and used the adjourning wall to kill the momentum.

“You aren’t injured, right?” (Hifumi)

“U, un … thank you, master.” (Kasha)

Is it due to being afraid or is it due to being carried in his arms? Kasha felt like her own heart beat had increased. Trying to not ponder about unnecessary matters, she quickly checked her equipment.

Likewise in the meanwhile, Hifumi gave sharp instructions.

“Do not speak from here on out. We still have some time left, with a little walking we should easily catch up. Pay attention to not make any obvious footsteps. Take out your swords.” (Hifumi)

Furthermore Hifumi told Kasha to wrap her body in a cloth he had taken out from his storage in order suppress the metallic clanking of her armor.

“Ano, master, I am …” (Origa)

“Origa, be ready to throw your shurikens at any time. If enemies turn up along the way, use my way of killing as a model. We will have to work hard in order to rescue Alyssa on time.” (Hifumi)

“I understand” (Origa)

“In order to not stray from each other, Kasha will place her hand on my shoulder and Origa will place hers on Kasha’s shoulder while we are advancing … Let’s go.” (Hifumi)

Through her palm Kasha felt the warmth of Hifumi’s body temperature being transmitted. For some reason it felt uncomfortable.

For ending up reacting in such a way, she likewise felt like apologizing. She was grateful how well he treated her. Yet, the skills and attitude he used in order to kill people still struck fear into her.

It was only a few minutes of moving forward along the shadows of the buildings without being hit by moonlight when

Hifumi suddenly stopped and turned to the two in his back.

Entering the decaying deserted house in front of them, he murmured in a small voice.

“This seems to be the right building. There are 5 people inside and two people are patrolling the vicinity of this building.” (Hifumi)

After telling them that they should observe his way of killing, which he would display here, he merely separated from Origa’s group slightly before he melt into the darkness visibly erasing his presence.

Although he had to be close by, Origa and Kasha lost sight of him after he vanished into the darkness.

From the shadow of the building two men approached.

It was the guard patrolling outside the abandoned building.

Without having any kind of conversation, the two passed the spot where Hifumi had been before. In an instant an arm was wrapped around the lower face of one, drawing him soundlessly into the darkness.

As his body went stiff due to the surprise and suffocation, a sickle immediately slit his throat quietly ending his life.

“Nn?” (Guard B)

The other person noticing that the guy who was supposed to be next to him vanished, turned his head for a second before the point of a katana pierced his throat.

Without even realizing what has happened, the man died just like that.

“Alright, come here.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi’s voice called the two.

Taking care to not make any sound as they approached in the direction of the faint voice, the figure of Hifumi, who was pressing his ears against the wall of the abandoned building in order to to check the state inside, dimly appeared before them.

“The interior of this building isn’t divided into rooms similar to a warehouse, that’s the current state. Alyssa is on the other side of the wall. I don’t know whether she is bound to a pillar or pinned to the wall, but it appears that she is still breathing.” (Hifumi)

Apparently three people were in front of Alyssa and the other two were located inside around the entrance on the right side.

Origa’s group would lure out the two at the entrance to kill them swiftly while Hifumi would raid the interior to attract the attention of the other three in order to support them.

“I will enter from a different location.” (Hifumi)

“Another location? There is another entrance?” (Origa)

As the building was in quite a worn out state, the wooden doors covering the windows were rotten and had holes a small person might fit through, too.

“You don’t have to worry. Since there will be some light, it will become difficult to see for a moment after stepping inside. Be careful of that. I leave the timing of the break in to you.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi erased his presence once again and left the place.

Coming in front of the door, Origa and Kasha glanced at each other exchanging a short nod.

Origa chanted a spell with a small voice. The hinge of the door was broken with the minimum force of wind blades required.

As the hinge had become thoroughly worn out, it was very easily disconnected. The door slowly began to fall towards the outside.

The light from inside shone in a rectangle onto the street.

“… This place is at its limit too, huh?”

Without any kind of vigilance the head of a man peeked out. Kasha swung down her sword with all her might. The head was severed as it is alongside the helmet tumbling down on the street with a *koro koro* .

“An enemy!”

The other guard drew his sword while quietly checking the outside. Discovering Kasha right in front of him, he closed the distance even though he was surprised.

However, Origa’s shuriken dug into his calf causing him to fall down in pain. Kasha slew him where he fell.

Jumping over the corpses of the men, Origa and Kasha rushed inside. There they saw a man thrusting his sword in front of Alyssa whose hands were pinned to the wall with nails.

The remaining two men raised their swords in preparation in front of the two.

There didn’t seem to be anyone present who could be a corporal.

Although Alyssa was bearing the pain, she was surprised by seeing the two charging inside.

“You are the attendants of that noble from that time!” (Guard C)

“Though we aren’t attendants.” (Kasha)

“We came to rescue her.” (Origa)

Although she said so, Origa, who surveyed the inside of the room, was panicking within her mind.

Hifumi had said he would infiltrate from another location, but since the room was surrounded by a wall of stone it didn’t seem at all possible that there was another infiltration point.

“Kill them.” (Guard C)

“”Understood.”” (Guards)

Just like with the soldiers during the day, without showing their wavering emotions, the two prepared their swords while sidling up.

At such short distance there was certainly no chance to use magic.

Considering to use the shurikens as a diversion, Origa called out to Kasha.

“Since I will be holding both of them back, you can use the time to …” (Origa)

“Understood.” (Kasha)

Believing in the ability of her close friends, she tightly grasped the magic wand.

However, her determination was interrupted by a scream.

“Kyaa!” (Alyssa)

“Guwa!” (Guard C)

The cute shriek originated from Alyssa.

The other scream came from the man threatening Alyssa with his blade.

All of the sudden a katana passed by from the side of Alyssa’s face, piercing through the chest of the man before her eyes.

Not only was the person stabbed surprised, but even Alyssa got startled.

In contrast, Origa and Kasha who were watching that scene, were relieved since they understood right away who had done this.

As the stabbing katana was extracted, the man collapsed dead with an astonished expression.

Furthermore after a few scraping sounds, a crack appeared on the wall surrounding Alyssa before it became brittle and crumbled down in the blink of an eye.

Alyssa, who collapsed on the spot, was caught by Hifumi from behind.

“It seems you are quite unlucky, be it this morning or now.” (Hifumi)

“Hifumi-san!” (Alyssa)

Having already lost all her strength, Alyssa was listlessly hanging from complete exhaustion. With teary eyes she looked up to Hifumi while bearing the pain. And even though her face was swollen she showed a clumsy smile.

Due to Hifumi’s absurd way of intrusion, the remaining two men were in a dumbfounded state.

Not missing this chance, Kasha killed them slashing their backs in succession.

For both of them it was instant death.

Leaving the corpses as they were, Hifumi’s group at once returned to the inn, retrieved the horses, and tied them to a carriage outside.

Making use of one of the carriages stopped there, they placed Alyssa inside and covered her with a blanket.

Having had nails struck into both hands and being obviously thoroughly beaten, Alyssa had bruises everywhere.

Because of the fatigue and injuries, it was already impossible for her to walk straight and likewise it was impossible to sleep due to the pain.

Thus she was only laying there.

While vacantly staring at the canopy part covering the roof of the carriage, Alyssa was weeping due to being rescued from this crisis and the anxiety of the future yet to come.

I may not be able to return to being a soldier anymore, I think … Leaving that aside, I think it has come to the point where I might not be able to move anymore … I am not certain that I can move my legs and hands at all. It is painful. At the time I was rescued I was happy, but what shall I do from here on out?

The people she considered to be her allies tried to kill her, just to be rescued by a noble and his attendants from another country. Alyssa wasn't able to imagine how she should proceed from now on.

Rather than that, if she ended up being unable to move her body as it is … she had to prepare for the worst in that situation, too, she concluded.

"I am coming in." (Hifumi)

Suddenly she heard such a voice, and without waiting for her reply either the figures of two people could be seen entering the carriage.

It was Hifumi and Origa.

Kasha, for whom it was painful to see the horribly wounded Alyssa, remained outside the carriage to stand on guard.

"Hifumi-san …" (Alyssa)

"Stay still and don't move." (Hifumi)

Sitting down besides Alyssa, Hifumi gently touched all over her body atop her clothes.

Sometimes the places he touched caused her pain.

She didn't feel repulsed by his action. Becoming aware of the serious expression Hifumi displayed while examining her, she removed her gaze from him to the figure of Origa who just like Hifumi watched her with a similar expression.

Ah, that's the kind of person he is, Alyssa thought and concluded to leave everything in Hifumi's hands.

"I am not sure how many ribs are broken. Besides the injuries on both hands, the bones of the right arm and both feet are fissured." (Hifumi)

Upon being told about the situation with extreme serenity, Alyssa accepted her fate.

"Hifumi-san, I have a request. Could you please kill me … ?" (Alyssa)

"How did it come to such talk?" (Hifumi)

Hifumi was tilting his head in confusion. Origa softly touched him while informing him.

"When it comes to such a degree of injuries, you have to receive healing from a high ranking healer or use a great number of high grade restorative medicine. Either way dozens of gold coins are required." (Origa)

"That's true. I can't pay such amount of money. Since I can't already do any kind of work in this condition … and because I don't want to cause trouble for someone with my impairment. Please resolve yourself to kill me. If it is Hifumi-san, I …" (Alyssa)

Apparently her voice was quite audible as Kasha could be heard sobbing outside.

Origa was shedding tears as well.

Though the mood of the carriage's interior was dominated by depression, Hifumi looked as if it had nothing to do with him.

“If that’s the case, there is no problem.” (Hifumi) (ED: *Farewell Alyssa, your arc was short yet sweet!*)

“Huh?” (Alyssa)

“As for restorative medicine, I bought a massive amount of them before leaving the capital. You don’t have to worry about using them.” (Hifumi)

From his storage he took out bottles made out of glass one after the other and lined them up on the floor.

Although a veteran adventurer would be hesitant to buy even one bottle of such high grade restorative medicine, the situation now made it seem as if it was a completely cheap article. Someone who was aware of their value would likely lose consciousness upon seeing such a spectacle.

“M-Master, why do you have so many?” (Origa)

“There is restorative medicine?!” (Kasha)

Kasha had jumped into the carriage, too.

“Kasha, be a bit more quiet. So, do you drink this? Or do you apply it on the wounds? Since I haven’t tried them yet, I don’t know how to use them nor how effective they are.” (Hifumi)

“Both methods are fine, Master. For external wounds you sprinkle it on top and for the inner bone fractures you drink it in order for it to be effective.” (Origa)

“U-using such expensive medicine, I don’t have money for that …” (Alyssa)

“It’s alright, Alyssa. Master is a rich person.” (Origa)

In order to clear Alyssa’s mind from concerning with monetary issue, Origa told her to let it go.

Forcibly pouring it into her mouth and sprinkling it over her hands and feet, the blanket became soaked, but all of Alyssa’s wounds were healed.

“It has such an immediate effect, huh? If only it wasn’t this expensive.” (Hifumi)

“Th-Thank you very much …” (Alyssa)

They had used the restorative medicine literally like water. Alyssa who didn’t understand why it was fine to do so, still managed to express her gratitude somehow.

“For now it might be difficult for Alyssa but from here on out it is work” (Hifumi)

“Ah, yes …” (Alyssa)

Having received so many things.

Alyssa didn’t think it would be done with a few words of gratitude.

Speaking of things to do, there was nothing but to support Hifumi.

Even so, that was fine. Alyssa waited for Hifumi’s words.

“Do you want to get your revenge alongside these fellows?” (Hifumi)

Next to the smiling Origa, Hifumi asked.

This is nothing else but the whispering of a devil, Kasha realized that it was already too late to retreat from this place as she saw the smiling faces of Hifumi's group.

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Chapter 22 – Another One Bites The Dust

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Alyssa nodded towards Hifumi's invitation.
"My parents are no longer alive, and having been in the border security for so long, I don't really have any acquaintances either. So I'll come along with you guys. I'd like to exact revenge, but above that, I'd like to repay this debt", Alyssa said, whilst looking Hifumi in the eye.
"Suddenly, everyone at the border were killed, the Corporals were beaten, and I was forcibly made to run away. Until just now, I didn't even know what was going on, and was hurting so much all over my body that I didn't even know where it was the most painful. I really thought I was going to die."
She couldn't skillfully transmit her thoughts and kept talking, even though her explanations were all over the place, while Hifumi and the rest listened quietly.
"But then you came along and saved me, and even cured all of my pain… However, except my thanks, I don't have any money or anything else to offer. Therefore, I'll become your slave. I won't complain even if you boil me."
When the word slave was mentioned, Origa unintentionally let out a smile.
"Alyssa, both me and Kasha are Hifumi's slaves, you know?"
"Eh? With your fine equipment, and how you're talking familiarly with Hifumi, I thought you were his attendants, or perhaps… his lovers…"
"Well, it's true that we've been given so good treatment we've almost forgotten we're slaves in the first place. But attendants, huh? That doesn't sound so bad."
"Lover… that's kind of…"
It seems like the words in her sentence that Kasha and Origa reacted on were different. Hifumi retrieved some dried meat and bread from his storage to snack on, while calmly observing the spectacle.
"Master, even though Alyssa is currently deciding what to do with her life…"
"Don't mind me, I was just hungry."
Vigorously eating his food, Hifumi suddenly came to think of something.
"You're saying slaves, but once we return to the capital, I'll let you free, you know?"
"Eh? Why?"
"Ma-Master!? Are you dissatisfied with us in any way? We'll better, so please…"
Kasha looked gave Hifumi a blank look, while Origa started clinging to him.
"After catching Beirevra, and resolving the conflict that lead to you becoming slaves, you don't need to be slaves anymore, right?"
Without knowing how the laws in Orsongrande works, it should still be a matter of course that in case you're being punished for something you didn't do, and show proof of your innocence, your punishment should be removed.
"But Master bought us, and we don't even know if that money will be repaid."
"I don't particularly mind. Money isn't all that valuable. Buying slaves was because it's both what the person teaching me this world's general knowledge wanted me to to do, as well as me thinking it'd be inconvenient to travel alone. As for choosing you two specifically… Well, besides your looks being fairly good, as far as I'm concerned, you also also had some ability."
Saying that, Hifumi threw the remaining dried meat into his mouth.
"But as I said earlier as well, I'm letting you free when this matter is over and we return to the capital. Until then, it'd be good if you can think about what you want to do after that."
"Excuse me… I wonder what I should do now?"

Alyssa, completely left behind in the conversation, timidly asked.
“Right. I don’t really need any slaves.”
“I see… A small and weak person like me don’t have any uses…”
Seeing Alyssa getting downcast, Origa looked a little anxious. But being in front of her Master, she couldn’t really do anything on her own accord, and therefore decided to keep silent.
“I’m currently just a wandering fake noble, so there’s no point in having a lot of slaves. Still, you’re free to follow us of your own volition.”
Alyssa quickly raised her head, while Hifumi continued.
“However, I have an objective. Or rather, after seeing how people in this world fight, I’ve made up my mind on something.”
“Made up your mind on what?”
“I won’t tell you the specifics, but like you’ve seen until now, there will be a lot of bloodshed. If you’re coming along, a lot of killing will be necessary, and there’s always the risk of getting killed yourself.”
Alyssa only saw Hifumi fight once, by the border. But looking at Origa and Kasha’s facial expressions, she faintly whispered “more than that?”, and subsequently got an understanding on what considerable carnage may look like.
“But, I’m not strong like that…”
Alyssa said without self-confidence, to which Hifumi grinned broadly and let out a laugh.
“I’ll teach you some fighting techniques. Besides, just fighting isn’t what matters. What really matters is your resolve.”
It’s not something you need to answer to anytime soon, he also added.
More importantly, what actions should be taken now?
Having Alyssa tell them the location of the town representative’s mansion, Hifumi strapped his sword to his waist.
“Alyssa will wait here, while Origa and Kasha keep guard. If enemies appears, kill them.”
“Understood.”
Hearing Origa’s answer, Hifumi got off the carriage.
Stretching his back, he looked up at the moon.
It was still cloudy outside, scarce with moonlight.
The night flowing with blood had yet to conclude.
Hifumi didn’t specifically talk about it, but he had come to a conclusion about something he was very dissatisfied with.
It was the fact that no one in this world had any tension regarding the possibility of being killed at any time.
It was the same when he heard about the fight between Orsongrande and the Beastmen tribe. It seemed like the wars of this world was more on the level of skirmishes. Of course some people died, but real wars rarely happened. Struggles between individuals were much fiercer.
In areas with strong demons that might not be the case, but the fights between humans that looked more like some kind of sports event, was all that Hifumi currently knew about. The degree of people doing a bit of scheming is more an art of deception, rather than the art of war.
Boring.
Coming to this world, being able to kill people, Hifumi felt satisfied for a while. However, he soon started building up resentment towards the people in this world, with their carefree disposition.
There are no strong people here. No people frantically scheming for their lives. No opportunity to use the dark magic painstakingly developed through the nights. Wars where people are desperately racking their brains, where the warriors were hoarding weapons, and where each country respectively were fighting frenetically to ensure their survival… none of these existed either.
Maybe that’s good if you’re striving for peace.
But there are threats.
Why are no one earnestly trying to kill their enemies?
Like this, it’s no different from Japan.
While expressing his displeasure, he arrived at the town representative’s mansion.
The town representative was a middle aged man named Ortis, a descendant of the merchant who was the key

figure in the construction of this town.
A building three stories tall made out of stone, adorned with several windows made out of glass, in this world, was something showing that you have money.
He's here.
According to what Alyssa saw during the day, a man seeming like a Colonel was also present in the building.
Wonder if she come here to report before? Whichever the case, it was no longer of any interest. In the town's current circumstances, gathering information became a difficult task. Therefore, the best way to do it was in a much simpler fashion.
By the entrance, two haggard soldiers were conspicuously standing guard, with swords handing from their waists.
Seeing that, Hifumi heaved a sigh. As *expected.* Once you've seen them, your eyes will unconditionally be drawn there.
He first thought he could talk to them, but quickly gave up on the idea. The guards would realize something was amiss right from the start as they're most likely dealing with everything with the mindset of a being gate guardians.
The other time with the Marquis' residence was fine, but regarding these guards' current mentality, Hifumi only felt irritation come gushing forth.
He wordlessly walked closer to the guards, which they quickly discovered. But seeing that he didn't draw his weapon, they relaxed. That too, made Hifumi displeased.
"Okay, that's minus points."
The moment Hifumi put his hand on the hilt of his katana, the guards tensed up again. But he slashed their throats in succession, and they died without being able to raise their voices.
Slipping in through the unlocked gate, there was a huge door straight ahead. There were no guards in the garden, but inside the house were the presence of ten or so people.
Hifumi carefully observed for a while, but it didn't look like it was a trap.
Gripping the katana in his right hand, he boldly opened the front door.
Opening the door, he met eyes with a young, slender male servant.
"Eh, who are…"
"I'm an intruder."
Saying that, rather than waiting for an answer, Hifumi swiftly emerged behind the servant. After putting him in a choke hold and tripping him, Hifumi dragged him into the shadows of the staircase close by.
"Answer my questions in a low voice. If you do any strange movements, I'll kill you and find someone else to ask."
With an arm around his neck, the servant trembled while nodding.
"Where are Ortis and the Corporal?"
"R-right now, they are in the office on the s-second floor…"
After pressing him for information of where the office was located, Hifumi had the servant tell him if he knew about a man named Beirevra.
"T-that's…"
Hifumi felt that the response was weird, so he threatened him by sliding the blade over his chest, lightly cutting it.
"Uu… p-please stop…"
"If you want me to stop, speak."
"The man called Beirevra previously stayed here in this mansion."
Finding a clue like this from an unexpected source, Hifumi's irritation calmed down somewhat, urging the man to continue.
It seems that the servant was working with matters regarding the town's budget management.
As for Beirevra, he had apparently been coming here several times. The most recent visit seems to have been this morning.
Perhaps the voice Alyssa heard back then was him.
Hifumi had previously thought that Beirevra would make a quick escape, but it seems like he's taking his sweet time.
Not having stayed over during the night, Beirevra had apparently come early in the morning, and left right after talking to Ortis about something.
As it didn't seem like he'd get any more information out of this, Hifumi strangled the guy, making him fall

unconscious.
He first had thoughts of killing him, but it didn't seem appropriate.
While feeling irritated, and regretting having accepted this task, Hifumi climbed up the stairs.
Without hesitating, Hifumi opened the door to the office and stepped inside.
There were two persons inside the room. The Corporal he met during the day, and a middle aged man. Presumably Ortis.
"It's you."
The Corporal uttered while brandishing his sword, stepping towards Hifumi with heavy steps.
"I have no need for you…"
When he came into striking distance, Hifumi trampled down on the top of his foot, and thrust him down on the ground before crushing his ankle.
While the Corporal was clumsily trying to stand up, Hifumi stepped down on his chest and pierced his neck with the katana, delivering the finishing blow.
"Well then. Ortis, I presume? I've got a couple of questions for you."
Facing Hifumi who just killed a man without a changing of expression, Ortis face turned pale, and he shakily stood up from the table.
"I-if you think you can behave like this to me, don't think you can get awa…"
"I don't need you to tell me that."
Swinging the blade, a red line appeared on both of Ortis' arms.
"Hiiii!?"
"Too bad we don't have time. I'm getting a bit tired, so I'd like to finish this. Just killing a few people, I can't feel the tension anymore."
Hifumi complained about the annoying job he got.
"W-what do you want to know?"
"There are a few things. Who is Beirevra, where did he go, and what is he doing? I also want to know why the town's soldiers are acting weird. The ones I killed earlier where lacking emotional ups and downs, and had a dull sense of pain. What was done to them?
"Be-Beirevra is a spy sent from the capital of Vichy. Where he is and what he's doing, I don't know…"
"You met him this morning, didn't you? What did you talk about? What has he been tasked with?"
Listening to what Ortis was saying while flicking with his katana, Hifumi was arranging the information in his head.
Apparently, Beirevra was an agent dispatched from the Capital of the so called city-state, and it seems like he mainly asked Ortis about the intelligence collected from Orsongrande. Though he was never told the contents concerning Orsongrande's internal activities.
As for the soldiers, it seems it was an experiment of a newly developed magic tool sent from the Capital.
It was also something Beirevra brought with him, with effects that could strengthen the body, which he distributed amongst the soldiers.
"So, is the suppression of emotions a side effect from that?"
"I don't know either. I asked the Capital for an explanation, but 'watch over the process' is all they told me. It didn't hinder my work so…"
"Alyssa wasn't equipped with one of those magic tools?"
According to the information Ortis got, apparently they can't bear the body strengthening if they're too young.
"For now, that's all I wanted to ask."
"For now? Are you planning to come back!?"
"No, you're the one coming."
Hitting him hard on the back of his neck with the back of the katana, Ortis consciousness was let go.
Exiting the originally sparsely guarded mansion, Hifumi returned with a horse carriage. He entrusted Origa and the rest with tying up Ortis, while he himself entered the inn.
Ahead of him was the inn owner's room.
Opening the door, the old man was snoring in bed, not noticing Hifumi intruding.
Drawing his katana, he stabbed the sleeping old man in the heart, before flicking the blood off the blade and

returning it to its sheath.
He then left the room without saying anything.
“Something you had forgotten?”
“Just tying up some loose ends.”
Answering Origa’s question, Hifumi jumped up on his horse, announcing they were leaving the town, going towards Fukaroru.
“Master, are we returning?”
“According to what Ortis said, Beirevra is a spy from the Capital of Vichy. The current situation could affect negotiations between countries, but it’s a bother, so I’ll leave the investigation to Pajou and them. That aside, Alyssa.”
“Y-yes!”
“Like I said earlier, we’re returning to Orsongrande for now. As for what we’re doing after that, we’ll decide when the time arrives. Are you really planning on coming with us?”
Not just the town, but you’d be discarding even your country, he told her. But Alyssa just responded with a resolute nod.
“I don’t mind. My resolution stretches beyond that.”
“I see. Just do as you like.”
“We’ll be counting on you, Alyssa.”
“Following this Master is difficult, you know? You have to work hard.”
While Alyssa was getting along with the slaves, Hifumi said he’d drive, and turned his back to Alyssa, before jumping up the coachman seat. The wagon started to advance on the road, and Hifumi let out a smile, unbeknownst to the others.
This is good. If Alyssa also can learn my way of fighting, it should be possible to spread the spirit of war throughout the country. Throughout the world.
Maybe because Origa and Kasha originally had some previous experience, Hifumi thought that teaching them was going fairly well. This was just a simple experiment, but if they just got a bit more familiar with his teachings, they’d be able to enter the ranks of the quite strong people in this world.
Alyssa on the other hand couldn’t use magic, and was by no means physically strong. But if he could prove that she could fight on an above average level due to martial arts and tactics, the way the world waged war was bound to experience change.
Whether it be individually, in group, town or country, without being able to choose the means themselves, their true struggle for life would begin.
For that purpose, having some kind of social status may be for the best, Hifumi thought. A status able to mobilize a lot of people. In other words, a status being able to start huge battles.
Since I somehow managed to get the rank of Patrician, let’s finally put it to use. Imeraria, you planned to summon a hero, didn’t you? Then I’ll become your hero. A hero whose name resounds throughout the world. I’m really looking forward to what degree of bloodshed that will result in.
The excitement of strife, of battle. The tension of the night raids. Desperately fending for oneself, killing the ones failing to… Just imagining it, Hifumi got a warm feeling in his chest.
Cutting a motionless scarecrow would be boring. I want to kill because they’re alive .
I want to mold the world, in order to kill, the summoned hero secretly decided for himself.

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Chapter 23 – Runaway

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“Let’s go!” (Hifumi)

Approaching the town’s exit, Hifumi called out sharply while holding his katana and galloping on his horse.

“Just a moment!” (Kasha)

Kasha, who was the coachman, raised the speed of the carriage in a hurry but it wasn’t a speed that could catch up to Hifumi no matter how.
In an instant they were separated. Hifumi vanished into the darkness in front. One of the heads of the three soldiers in front of the gate was severed. In the act of passing each other, it was cut and sent flying.
While using the momentum of killing him, Hifumi turned around and once again hurried on his horse. Slashing his katana from atop of the horseback, he killed yet another person.
Just one single soldier was left now. As the carriage arrived, the soldier was at last being successful in drawing his sword, the carriage arrived.

“Alyssa, get off.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi dismounted from the horse and pointed his katana into the direction of the soldier to keep him in check. Without shifting his attention he addressed Alyssa.
At once Alyssa jumped down from the carriage.
Immediately following after the forceful healing with restorative medicines, she didn’t seem to have any problems with movement.

“I am lending this to you.” (Hifumi)

Coming close to Alyssa, Hifumi passed on his katana to her.

“Huh? …” (Alyssa)

Though the soldier came slashing at them, he was easily forced back with a front kick causing him to be thrown down.

“Kill this guy with this.” (Hifumi)

“Th-that is …” (Alyssa)

Although Alyssa received the katana, she was hesitating upon being told to kill the soldier.
Maybe she recognized his face.
Once more throwing himself upon them, the soldier approached. Having a short blade driven into the inner side of his sword arm’s wrist, the soldier dropped his sword. Hifumi grabbed the back of his neck and pulled him down. Immediately trying to get up again, Hifumi firmly stepped down on his elbow. Due to the build of a human being, the soldier wasn’t able to get up any more.

“From now on you will kill a lot of opponents. The person you just yesterday had a friendly chat with, might have to be killed today. First off, kill this guy. Kill the opponent that tried to kill you, in order to completely separate from this place.” (Hifumi)

Without any hesitation, Hifumi spoke those words. Catching her breath, Alyssa set up the katana without losing any time.

“That’s fine. Up until this morning he was your colleague, but now that he betrayed and tried to kill you he is an enemy. If you won’t kill him, he will kill you.” (Hifumi)

Although those were clichéd words, they were effective on Alyssa who had experienced it by herself.
Upon lifting her head, there was no trace of indecision left within Alyssa’s eyes.

“I am borrowing this sword.” (Alyssa)

Alyssa thrust the katana at the soldier who was still continuing to struggle.
The sharpened point of the katana penetrated with a smooth, unhindered motion into the back of his head ending his life simply like that.

“… I have done it.” (Alyssa)

“You did well. Next we move to the national border.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi gently took the katana from Alyssa’s hands and replaced it with the sword of the dead soldier. Turning his back on her, he went towards the horse.

“Hifumi-san, I, did I do something good with this?” (Alyssa)

“… There is no good or bad. I told you what you should do and you decided yourself to do so. That’s all there is to it.” (Hifumi)

Wearing an expression that showed she didn’t quite understand, Alyssa went back to the carriage trudging with the sword in her hand.
The first step went smoothly, Hifumi thought.
Only after killing a person from Vichy for the first time, I was going to decide the future depending on Alyssa’s reaction.
If her spirit was broken by this, I would have chosen a suitable place to leave her behind afterwards.
However, beyond my expectations, Alyssa regarded the Vichy soldier with a powerful hostile spirit.
Although she might have been conflicted within her heart, when the attack came this way earlier, she resolved herself and put her heart into balance.
Not parting with the sword that was stolen from the killed opponent is a proof that she hasn’t abandoned her will to fight on yet.
Although there was a chance that she might bare his fangs at him, that in itself would be enjoyable as well. While laughing to himself, Hifumi returned atop the horse and they left the town behind by passing through the unmanned gate.

– National Border –

On Orsongrande’s side and Vichy’s side, both somehow managed to allocate soldiers taking charge to a certain degree within a few days.
From now on, all that was left was to increase the number of personnel coming here as it is. They would be divided back into their original unit upon returning.
On the Orsongrande’s border side, besides soldiers coming there was one more person, a knight.

It was Pajou.
In order to fully investigate the abnormal situation, she intended to stay here as visitor for a few days.
Currently, the corpse of the criminal who made his appearance here first and the corpse of Gothras, who was slain by Hifumi, were to be examined, as she was in the process of writing down the report.

“After all Vichy hasn’t formed an alliance with Horant yet, I wonder if they are not simply being used? The number of personnel loitering on their side of the border is identical to ours, was it only to experiment on the magic tool? But why? Acting in such way would make them enemies of two countries at the same time …”(Pajou)

As it is extremely unlikely to think about matters coherently with a worn out mind, I have to soon take a rest , Pajou thought, just as a scream reached her ears from a distance.
It seemed like there was someone fighting on the other side of the border.

“Good grief, there is no time to take a rest at all.” (Pajou)

While cursing, Pajou quickly equipped her armor and sword and rushed out of her own room.

The light of the dim torch only illuminated the necessary minimum of the location.
Basically the border wasn’t passed at night.
It was possible to fail to notice things in the darkness and judgement grew dull, too.
Rarely there were merchants and such who arrived at night due to ending up making a mistake in their planning.
They pass the time by camping a little bit away before devoting themselves to passing through the border in the morning.
Today it wasn’t such a idiotic merchant but an assailant appearing.

“Listen! Annihilate the soldiers on the Vichy side! Do not leave one person alive!” (Hifumi)

While riding the horse, Hifumi swung the fundou of the kusarigama (T/N: If you don’t know what that means, reread

the earlier chapters.　　)

“Plunge deeply up to the fortress with the carriage as it is! Immediately after disembarking, kill the group in the vicinity!” (Hifumi)

“””Understood!”””

Approaching the fortress, the two soldiers were setting up large shields side-by-side blocking the road.

“Stop!” (Guard)

“Who would stop here!” (Hifumi)

Magnificently jumping with his horse over the two soldiers, Hifumi wrapped the chain around the necks of the two defenseless soldiers in one go from overhead and dragged them down.

“Ha ha~ !” (Hifumi)

After about 10 meters of pulling them along, they were discarded. At the time of dragging them down, both of them had died by having their necks broken already.
The horses pulling the carriage quickly evaded the shields the soldiers dropped as they were hurrying on. The wheels of the main part of the carriage ran aground causing it to violently shake.

“Kya!” (Origa)

Origa having been thrown off balance was right away caught by Alyssa.

“T-Thank you.” (Origa)

While expressing her thanks, Origa noticed the quivering of Alyssa’s hand as she was touching her.

“Ano …” (Alyssa)

“It’s alright. Master is here and were are quite strong, too, okay?” (Origa)

Therefore it was fine, while gently smiling, Origa tightly held her magic staff as she was aiming for the right timing to jump off the carriage.
Suddenly the velocity of the carriage dropped.

“You are a hindrance!” (Kasha)

Apparently Kasha dealt with the enemy in front.
Hearing the voice, Origa immediately jumped off and although hesitating, Alyssa followed right after.
Disembarking from the back of the carriage, the pair faced the enemies separated to the left and right.
Having seen the moment arriving when the carriage plunged into the fortress, Hifumi left the horse after dismounting from it. He grabbed the head of a soldier, who was confronting Kasha, approaching him from the back and casually threw him at the fortress wall.
With only that, the soldier died.
Furthermore, he hit the soldier coming from his right side with the hilt of the katana causing him to become dizzy and then penetrated the blade through the eyes thus killing him.

“Gi!”

Clenching his teeth, the soldier raised his voice in death agony before dying after convulsing.

“Master …” (Kasha)

“Follow Alyssa.” (Hifumi)

Ignoring Kasha, who wanted to say something, Hifumi increased the corpse count while approaching the border.

“Orsongrande’s soldiers! Listen!” (Hifumi)

In a very very loud voice.
That voice of Hifumi, albeit yet quite a distance off the border, was heard by Pajou.

“This voice …” (Pajou)

“I am an Orsongrande noble called by the name Hifumi! Some of you soldiers should already know of me! Our country’s Viscount Hagenti was arrested! Do you know the reason for that?!” (Hifumi)

Hifumi’s voice carried over well.
Confirming the situation on the other side of the border, Orsongrande’s soldiers had heard it properly.

“Viscount Hagenti is a puppet of Vichy! Upon Princess Imeria’s decree I secretly infiltrated Vichy while risking my life. Viscount Kano was manipulated by Vichy. Again and again soldiers, who were manipulated by inhuman magic, showed up in our country and I was able to obtain evidence of their schemes! And furthermore Vichy tried to kill a young woman, who learnt of the secret behind the magic tool performance, too!” (Hifumi)

While talking, Hifumi killed two more soldiers.
Having displayed his abilities to some of the Orsongrande's soldiers, there were some amongst them starting to believe that him having received the Princess' secret decree wasn't strange at all either.

"Although it was dangerous, I succeeded in rescuing her from the crisis! But, in doing so my circumstances ended up being revealed! Though I somehow managed to defeat the pursuers, it is regrettable that I can't pass here!" (Hifumi)

As the soldiers turned their line of sight, there was a figure of a young woman desperately fighting while helping Origa and Kasha.
It was no one else but Alyssa.

"Soldiers of Orsongrande! Even though the national border is right ahead, there is no way to climb over the huge rock cliff! Don't mind us, but at the very least lend us your assistance to rescue this young woman! For the sake of saving her, I want all of you to display your righteousness!" (Hifumi)

As they were addressed by Hifumi, the soldiers looked at each others faces while wavering.

… What is he planning? … (Pajou)

As she would before long arrive at the fortress, Pajou was perplexed on the way.
I don't believe that Hifumi requires any reinforcement to begin with.
Then, why is Hifumi trying to have Orsongrande's soldiers cross the border?
As far as soldiers protecting the border are concerned, that is a heavy crime.
Rather, the significance behind doing so is a lot more serious than an ordinary person doing so.
However it can't be expected of Hifumi to know about that , Pajou considered.
Having arrived at the fortress myself, what would I decide to do in this situation?
If you think calmly about it, it will be unwise for knights and soldiers to cross the border of another country and thus invade it.
Even more so if the person they tried to rescue was someone having committed a crime in the other country.
No matter what, it is impossible.
However, choosing to not save them in this situation, the matter of not helping women and the matter of "not helping one's own country's citizens," these two matters will still remain as facts.
Rather than a knight, it might have bad consequences if the general soldiers lose their trust in the country. Likewise these facts will get around to the normal citizens, too.
Protecting the rules and thus disheartening the retainers or deciding to put the priority on saving lives, huh? …
Finally arriving at the fortress, Pajou was surprised to find out that the young woman Hifumi had specified was no other than Alyssa. Furthermore a great number of corpses could be instantly seen having fallen on the other side of the border. She recalled Hifumi's speech he gave just now.
『Although my circumstances became known, I managed to defeat the pursuers.』
If that was true, it was a matter of "Protecting a fleeing criminal who, while heading in the direction of Orsongrande, killed Vichy's soldiers en route."
The intervention by Orsongrande has already become a fact due to that.
Though I am not certain to what extent the other party is aware of matters, the significance to refrain from transgressing the border has already been lost.

Since it has come to this, we have to retrieve them no matter what it takes. It has also become necessary to tailor a beautiful tale about this. (Pajou)

Orsongrande is in the right. There is no other choice but vaguely denounce Vichy publicly, Pajou judged.

"All hands, draw your swords and assist them!" (Pajou)

Naturally holding a weapon too, Pajou started to run as vanguard. The other soldiers followed as well.
The reason was that the person-in-charge made the assessment.
Because of that their caution was easily dismissed.
Due to the fierce attack by the Orsongrande's side with their overwhelming numbers, the number of Vichy soldiers decreased in a blink of an eye.

After all Vichy soldiers had been killed, Hifumi, who crossed the border, expressively showed his thanks towards Pajou.

"It was a very courageous behavior. I wish to express my gratitude." (Hifumi)

"No, please don't worry about it. Leaving that aside, because I want to listen to the detailed report, come this way please." (Pajou)

To Pajou's guidance, Hifumi's group obediently followed.
Of course Hifumi was unhurt, the slaves and Alyssa too, to the degree of settling with a few scratched which hadn't to be minded.
Entering a vast conference room in the barracks close to the fortress, the soldiers standing guard were told to not let anyone enter for a while. Pajou urged on Hifumi's group to sit down.
After confirming that Hifumi's group had sat down, she sat down on a chair herself too while breathing a heavy sigh.

"Somehow you seem to be quite worn out." (Hifumi)

"Who's fault do you think that is? … So, usually I would expect you to explain right away, but …" (Pajou)

"Catch it." (Hifumi)

Retrieving a document from his darkness storage, Hifumi casually tossed it to Pajou.
After quickly looking through it, Pajou hung her head in shame and looked down from the corner of her eyes.

"Though it was impossible to read some parts, it seems that the lot at the central government of Vichy have used a magic tool from Horant to strengthen their soldiers. If those two countries succeed in cooperating, they are geographically the same as Orsongrande?" (Hifumi)

"In case this is real, you could say that …" (Pajou)

As Pajou was visibly squeezing out those words, Hifumi delivered the final blow.

"So, the representative of the town Aroseru, who received this as well, was arrested. He is still alive. He was left within the carriage." (Hifumi)

"Isn't that kidnapping!" (Pajou)

As Pajou slammed on the desk and stood up, Hifumi said without changing his expression.

"Did you have to expressively raise your voice so it could be heard by others? This was done rightly in order to completely save her from almost being killed at that place. With having this much evidence, the guy who can testify the validity of the document is here. What do you want to say before making a move? Vichy will reject everything like that." (Hifumi)

"This judgement will be made by the royalty and the high ranking nobles, not by those on site." (Pajou)

"No, not at all, you have decided on site just a little while ago. The situation has already started to develop. It's too late now." (Hifumi)

Upon Hifumi's words, Pajou couldn't do anything but watch his face in silence.
Olga's group, who were sitting lined up next to Hifumi, likewise were silent having their breath taken away after becoming aware of how their actions had developed into such serious affair.

"… Anyway, please stay at the barracks today. I will submit a report to the royal capital." (Pajou)

"Ah, there was the option to use birds as means of communication. Well then, while you are contacting the capital, please arrange for us to meet Imeria. Let's see, 『The man, who accomplished the secret decree while also ending up breaking the law in order to save a maiden, wishes to visit Her Highness in order to express his apology』." (Hifumi)

Wearing a doubtful expression, Pajou looked at Hifumi's face.
What is he scheming? Pajou tried to possibly read his mind. He was floating a faint smile without change as he caught her gaze.

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Chapter 24 – Welcome to the Black Parade

Clown: Howdy folks, guess who's here!

Pierrot: *Who? A fool?*

Clown: No, a clown!

Pierrot: *And who the hell would you be?*

Clown: … Clearly a nobody…

Pierrot: *So why are you introducing yourself?*

Clown: So that people know who translated this chapter!

Pierrot: *And who would that be?*

Clown: The two-person in one body–Clown and Pierrot!

At the break of dawn Hifumi and the others had departed the border. After simply passing through Fokalore, they quickly, they sped towards the Imperial Capital.
After storing their carriage away, they proceeded on horseback. Origa and the others were not carrying people, so Alyssa clung to Hifumi's back riding the same horse.

「Goshujin-sama, what would you be planning to do from now on?」
「As Pajo had said, I will meet Imeraria. I'll summarize the matters at that point, so do wait until then. And though it may be early, but upon reaching the capital I intend to discuss your release; so I intend.」
「But if we don't catch Beirevra, we won't be able to prove our innocence, would we?」

Her horse running parallel, Kasha looked back on the road representing the bright and cheerful days.

「Beirevra's name appears in the documents procured from Vichy. Labeling him as the Center's Spy, even. And though Arycelle's testimony, who is being escorted as we speak, is also necessary, what we have and know should suffice for the time being.」

The Vichy conspiracy of the Viscount led to two women adventurers falsely accused and reduced to mere slaves. These two girls were singled out by the quasi-knight and adventurer with a secret mission Hifumi, and even rescued a girl who was about to be killed by her allies.
Furthermore, the declaration to the rest of the country had also been decided, prompting Pajo to request that they pass along this message to Imeraria.

「・ ・ ・ Will it be alright? ・ ・ ・」

Listening to Hifumi's explanation, Alyssa felt as if she were being treated as some tragic heroine.

After reaching the Capital's vicinity without a major problem, they saw a number of knights standing beside the road.

「Yo, it's been a while」

One of the knights was Midas.
Dropping of his horse, Hifumi raised his hand and called out.

「It has been a long time, Hifumi-san」
「・・・What's up, why so formal?」
「It's not about me. The information Hifumi-san had delivered…. It has caused the Imperial Castle to fall into a panic. For the time being, Queen Imeraria herself has announced this incident to the people, and has decided to reward you for your efforts.」

Hifumi neither planned nor wanted neighboring countries to find the current absence of a king and financial difficulty as an ideal time to push their luck. However, the current state was too bizarre for them to ignore. Thus, using the Queen's permit and the fact that he had entered Vichy quite a few times, Hifumi had chosen to bring about some grand result and immobilize them by proclaiming Vichy's errors.
Up to this point, Imeraria should have amassed quit some support. She was manipulating the temporary, just-crowned prince and guiding the nation as its true leader.

「Moreover, they have been discussing the matter of your promotion」
「Whether I will become a knight?」
「No that…」

Hifumi, who had already become a rumor in the guild, was so flashy in dealing with Vichy that the castle town broke out into wild revelries. With no one discussing the possibility of war, proclaiming him a hero who had appeared during this peaceful time, the common folk could not help but feel touched but a story of a young man carrying out women's tragic revenge and saving them in the process.
So to punish Hifumi now, considering that the citizens are still recovering from their King's sudden death, would only lead to animosity between the people and the crown.

「Though it is not yet decided, the title is bound to be well above a common knight. We have come to escort Hifumi-san to the castle and protect you from the crowd. Contrary to our expectations, you have arrived quite quickly.」

And, "since you'll be promoted to a rank above a knight—above me, some will call you a hero and others will give outright ignore you" Midas' bitter smile seemed to convey; Hifumi acknowledged and asked for a carriage to be prepared.

「Frankly, we too had thought that Hifumi-san would be moving more discretely. Even after becoming a noble, we had figured you wanted a freer lifestyle…」
「Don't expect me to move according the wishes of nobles or countries」

After a carriage had been prepared, Hifumi jumped on his horse and looking down on Midas, laughed.

「I had intended to create this situation.」
「Eh?」
「Even so, I did not expect to stand out this much. Well, it's been a long time; let's go meet Imeraria.」

Hifumi went off ahead, and Midas hurried to catch up.

A large group of people had gathered by the front gate awaiting the hero's return.
Whether prompted by a lack of happenings in the past years, and due to the rumor that Hifumi would be soon arriving, the people had gathered at the gate to catch a glimpse of this hero who fought for justice and save the two enslaved "beauties" and the "lovely girl."
Even when the King had passed away suddenly from illness, the people did not react with such interest; and though

the fact that it was a funeral, the castle town's silence could be attributed to the fact that they took it as a stranger's problem.
The people even brought out food stalls, displaying the strength of the city's economic appetite.

「In some sense, I too am a traitor from Vichy, but I had not expected this kind of welcome…」

Alyssa, who was in the cart, began crying from nervousness upon seeing the great uproar that the city was in.

「Seems like we Kasha and I won't be treated as Goshujin-sama's extras this time around.」
「Seriously, it will be what it will be. I often don't understand what Goshujin is thinking, but I can't do anything about it at this point.」

From Hifumi and Midas' conversation, the three understood that they too had to accompany Hifumi to the castle. Which caused them to worry.
Sitting in the coachmen's seat, having just admitted to giving up on understanding Hifumi's ways, Kasha felt anxious to enter the Castle for the first time.
And while the wheels of the carriage turned, the gates opened releasing a flood people, who, as if finally having found Hifumi's group, raised their voices.

「Kasha. Stop for a second in front of the gate」
「Understood」

Nodding to Hifumi's instructions, Kasha dropped the speed.
And coming straight to the gate, stopping his horse, Hifumi addressed the crowd.

「Open me a path! I must go atone for my sins to Her Highness Imeraria!」

The people, who had been awaiting a hero's triumphant return, were bewildered by his words. They turned to each other, murmuring.

「I have heard from the knights who had come to meet me. That you have come to accept me most favorable. And you have my gratitude! But, I have crossed the border, and killed a man to save a little girl. Thus, I have exceeded my authority and betrayed Her Highness' trust… For this reason, I have come to confess my sin and accept my punishment!」

The commotion only exasperated.

「But these girls are not at fault! So I have come to tell Her Highness! Should I perish at the gallows tomorrow, I but ask that you welcome these girls warmly in my place!」

Imploring the people with grand gestures, o how did Hifumi appear to the people! Although he too was a noble, for the sake of the people… no, for the sake of slaves and people of another country he was willing to accept a punishment, and to save them—appear before the queen.
Moreover, upon his urging Arisa and Origa leaned out of the carriage. Including the driver, these were the girls he intended to protect; their young faces evoked in the people a desire to protect the girls.

「Those children are the slaves you say…」
「They were made slaves by those bastards at Vichy you know!」
「That knight-sama, though he is a little short, what a wonderful man」
「His aura is very different from other knights, no?」
「They were going to kill that little girl?」
「What demons those bastards at Vichy are!」

A murmur of truth and gossip spread among the crowd, but every mouth sang Hifumi praise and expressed pity for

Origa and the other girls.
While the murmur continued to spread, Hifumi urged his horse forward – intending to meet the Queen – and bowed slightly requesting the people to clear him the way.
The gathering parted creating a path from the gate all the way to the royal castle.
And with a humble expression on his faith, Hifumi continued forward.
When he looked back, he saw Kasha frozen from anxiety in the coachman's seat, and Midas' corps with a sour expression on their faces.
As they advanced through the street, myriad voices called to Midas' group asking them to save Hifumi. Unable to accept nor deny the request, the knights decided to avoided making eye contact with anyone in the crowd which only increased the people's anxiety; as a result, the crowd only grew louder.
(The knights too are unused to this, huh. Now then, what are the Queen's thoughts?)
When Hifumi raised his gaze to the castle he saw a single girl standing on the balcony.

When Hifumi passed through the castle gate, the steel gate closed behind him.
Since he was advanced leisurely through the city, the people faithfully led him all the way to the castle. On the other side of the gate, some loudly petitioned the crown for mercy while others loudly criticized it.
Hifumi got off his horse, and the three girls exited the carriage.

「Please leave the horses to me. If you please, meet with her Highness」
「Alright」

Leaving the horses to Midas, they were lead into the castle by a single knight.
The knights on the inside, unlike the time when Hifumi had first left the castle, were now looking at him with gazes full of wonder.
Since their gazes were also focused on Alyssa, Origa, and Kasha, the girls felt ill at ease.

「・・・Please wait in this room」

The knight said, and the maid opened the door.
Prior to entering, Hifumi said,

「Thank you for showing me in. But the three people hiding inside the room, you're a bother: get out」

Feeling the presence of a few people inside the room, the maid look inquisitively at Hifumi—having no idea what he was talking about, but the knight started to tremble.
Pajo and Midas would not do something like this, but the first division of the castle knights must not have heard yet of Hifumi's abilities.

「W-what are you…」
「Don't play dumb… well, I guess it's fine」

After entering the room, Hifumi stabbed his blade into the wall behind a decorative vase and the wall on the other side—decorated by a painting.
He could hear some muffled voices on the other side, and blood flowed from the floor.

「The guy in the ceiling seems to have run off, huh. You—I won't be as forgiving next time」

Stunned by Hifumi's performance, the knights looked towards the place where their comrades now lay dead, and left in a panic.
The maid, unable to understand the transpired, just stood dumbfounded.

「Could I get some tea? For a few people」
「P-please wait a moment!」

Calling out to the maid, Hifumi flopped onto the sofa. He didn't really have an attitude of someone who came to attone for his sins.

「・・・You haven't forgiven any of them」
「I did forgive that guy, though?」

While retorting to Kasha's comment, talking about the ceiling guy whom he let go, Hifumi tossed the katana into the storage.

「You guys sit down, too. We still have lots of work to do」

Perhaps wondering why the tea was late, Hifumi stretched his body with an aloof expression on his face; seeing this, the girls' anxiety could only grow.

「Her Royal Highness, Queen Imeraria!」

While Hifumi was casually sipping some tea, a maid knocked on the door and so announced.
And after the maid moved from the door, Imeraria entered. Seeing two pools of blood, she frowned.

「Please have the knight who escorted him here brought before later」

She told the maid who placed the tea at her seat, and ordered that no one is to enter this chamber for a while.
Imeraria then sat facing Hifumi.
She was just as dignified and beautiful as when they had first met.

「It's been a while, eh. I heard you're handling things pretty well around here」
「If possible, I would have preferred not to meet you… but I have caused you great inconvenience with Duke Lagraen's and Viscount Hagenti's incidents. Moreover, the men here have also acted excessively…」

Imeraria directed her gaze at the blood stained floorboards.

「Don't sweat it. Besides, I'm putting your third knight corps to good use」
「Now then, you have something to tell me?」
「Ah, before that, I believe there's something on your mind, no?」

Sighing heavily, the Queen's eyes wandered off Hifumi and focused on Alyssa.

「So you would be Alyssa, right? I have received the report」
「Y-yes! Umm… what… what is my fate?」

With a gentle smile, Imeraria tried to convey as much gentleness in her voice as possible,

「Don't worry. You will be treated as this country's citizen. If you so desire, how about working here in the castle?」
「Umm, about that… I have yet to repay my debt to Hifumi-san….」
「I see. Feel free to come to my side at any time」
「T-thank you…」

Smiling at Alyssa one more time, Imeraria returned her gaze to Hifumi.

「You have handled things well, I see」
「Yeah, somehow」
「That was sarcasm」
「I know」

Sipping her tea, Imeraria continued.

「I have received Pajo's report. Since it came from her, it covers the information contained in the documents in your possession. And thanks to the commotion outside, my hands are rather tied, so I'll have to recognize Hifumi-sama as a hero and have our ambassadors to Vichy and Holanto pass along some unpleasant news to them」

Moreover, Imeraria continued,

「Origa-san, Kasha-san」
「Yes!」

Origa replied while Kasha stood poised.

「Because of this country's putrid nobles you have found yourself degraded to slaves; as a representative of the royal family who controls the nobles, I express my deepest apology. I apologize for my inability to do so publicly and hope that you will accept my apology」
「Your Highness, while we do regret becoming slaves, we have not faced any misfortune after being bought by Goshujin-sama. Moreover, we were able, with these hands of ours, to carry out revenge…」

Kasha merely nodded at Origa's words, unable to decide whether or not she had the right to address the Queen herself. Honestly, however, like Alyssa, she was rather poor with words.

「Your words put my heart at ease. Since yours is a special case, I will have the castle magicians release your slave crest. We'll have this done immediately, so please live freely from now on」
「We thank you for showing such unexpected benevolence」

Origa and Kahsa deeply lowered their heads.

「Furthermore, I would like to have Hifumi-sama become a Viscount and rule over Fokalore and the surrounding villages in place of Viscount Hagenti.」
「Oh? I have come to receive a punishment though?」
「Please stop joking around. If we were to punish Hifumi we would lose the goodwill of the people. Did you seriously expect me to do something so thoughtless?」

Hifumi was once again taken aback by how well Imeraria carried herself as a statesperson. At the same time, he decided to make as much use of her as he could.

「My bad. I'll gladly accept the title. Nor could I hope for a better land」
「Hope? Are you planning something again?」

Imeria asked with concern on her face; Hifumi merely sipped some tea and answered.

「I will crush Vichy. So gruesomely that they will never think to cross paths me again」

And the look on his face stole everyone's breath away…

Chapter 25 – Take A Look Around

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The Vichy central committee is run by 5 committees representing the 5 large cities, popularly abbreviated to “Centre” in Vichy.
Basically every city recognises it’s own local authority that has a structure to it.
A liason from the centre is sent to each city, while on the surface a perfect observation system for the centre, a perfect cover for spies. For that reason, a city-state trying to withdraw from Vichy had not happened for more than 50 years….
「 What on earth…? What is going on! 」
In the central committee’s simply decorated yet dignified conference room, a corpulent fat man raised his voice.
「 This clamour is pointless. First it is necessary to gather information. 」
「 In any case, the representative for Arusel is unaccounted for. According to the observer sent, most of the soldiers seem to have been killed. Collecting information will take time. 」
「 While we’re being slow, Orsongrande is possibly starting something. 」
「 Impossible. There is no reason for strife, nor is there any indication of such from their goods circulation. 」
The central committee members exchanged several opinions, “It seems that many of Arosel’s troops have been murdered” being the predominant theme.
Legally speaking, protests should be lodged with Orsongrande, but cannot for lack of evidence.
「 Excuse me! 」
A soldier rushed into the unsettled conference room carrying an official document.
「 What? We’re in the middle of a meeting right now. 」
「 That is…. A letter of protest has reached our country from Orsongrande. 」
「 Letter of protest!? 」
A man stood up hitting the desk, his large stomach wobbling, and snatched the document from the soldier.
「 Th-This… 」
Seeing the man at a loss for words, a female committee member took the document from him and looked it over.
「 Let me see… 」
According to the document from Orsongrande, the committee of Horant had obtained magic tools that twisted human nature, the city-state had also issued instructions for the death of an innocent woman. Furthermore, a protest against using these magic tools for aggressive behaviour within Orsongrande territory, backed up with evidence and an eyewitness.
Moreover, Orsongrande called out the high-handedness of the city-state’s central committee over time and questioning the independent actions carried out under their jurisdiction, calling for allies to separate from Vichy, ending with telling the central committee to come down hard on this in the name of justice.
「 This is no protest, it’s a declaration of war! 」
「 Why in the world…. 」
「 Immediately contact every city and tell them not to reply to this joke of a protest from Orsongrande. 」
「 Definitely….. You! Immediately notify our contacts in every city! 」
「 Yes! Understood! 」
The soldier who brought the document immediately rushed out of the conference room.
「 This is a great danger for Vichy. If by some chance a city-state emerges considering separating….. 」
「 I think that is quite unlikely. I don;t know about here, but establishing an independent nation won;t be considered

in other city-states.」
「Is that so? ….. Considering the military forces, the beastmen tribe area and the Horant side have more troops present. If you think about it, our country will not be affected to that extent.」
Relief filled the conference room for a while, but the interaction with Orsongrande had yet to be decided.
The meeting ended with the decision of cooperation for the time being, albeit half-heartedly.
The future may have been different if they had taken a proactive defense regarding Orsongrande, but with common sense was usually disregarded in favour of possible selfish gains.

It was Hifumi's second day at the castle. They had stayed over at the castle.
「The assembly of the allied city-states is dispersed everywhere, an easy way to maintain stability and cooperation. With the right cooperation, economy grows well. However, every city-state will defend itself, and the patriotic feeling that every "country" has is much lower.」
Hifumi explained while cheerfully munching on a steak in the morning.
The instigator of the protest document to Vichy was obviously him.
Sitting with him were Princess Imeraria and Alyssa. Origa and Kasha had been released from slavery.
Even though they were freed, they had not left Hifumi. With their revenge still unaccomplished, they were now employed exclusively by Hifumi as adventurers to travel with him. They strongly wished to accompany him so, Hifumi lightly said 「Well then, you're hired. For now, until Beirevra is caught and killed.」
Alyssa was employed as an attendant to Hifumi, who was treated as a viscount. At any rate, she was relieved at having obtained a social position in this country. Once the promotion ceremony ends, they would go to the territory.
「However, would the tentative explanation received be enough, I wonder…..」
In contrast to Hifumi, Imeraria was clearly uneasy, reflected in her appetite.
The day Hifumi had returned to the castle, Imeraria made the document to send to Vichy as proposed by Hifumi. It was delivered to Vichy's central committee via the ambassador to Vichy who received it by pigeon and a fast horse. It would probably reach Vichy that day or the next. That was the fastest level of communication in this world.
At the time, Hifumi told them to send the documents to each city in Vichy before the central committee began to move.
「In any case, it is impossible to keep the movements of every city under surveillance. Unawares, the neighbouring city may be an enemy, amusing, isn't it. Besides, on examining the documents, the centre has a large number of troops. Due to this, each city will send their agents everywhere there is great influence and financial strength. The central committee will desperately scramble for control.」
Imeraria was unable to object to Hifumi's words. After a brief consultation with the Prime Minister, it was hurriedly arranged. Though now doubts have come up with time. At the time, it was a hasty action, but at this point, could it be likened to a declaration of war?
「At least the strength of their political system is nonexistent. Thanks to their council system, it'll lead to squabbles and it's unlikely that they will move for two weeks at the earliest.」
While saying so, Hifumi rose. Origa, Kasha and Alyssa attempted to follow, but stopped when he signalled them not to.
「Where to?」
「Shopping near the castle for a while.」
Throwing up a hood to hide his face, Hifumi left the room as though he had not a care in the world.
「Um….」
After Hifumi left the room, Alyssa opened her mouth. All eyes focused upon her.
「About Hifumi-san, saying something extreme like crushing Vichy, but sending documents instead, seems rather gentle, isn't it?」
「Alyssa-san, as a noble's attendant, your speech will require correction.」
「Auu….」
Alyssa instantly withered at Imeraria's quiet rebuke.
「Apart from that, Mr. Hifumi's actions are not gentle at all.」

「 What do you mean? 」
「 Mr. Hifumi probably intends to use divide and conquer to capture the city states. As a result of that, now when Vichy moves, the troops on the side joined with Horant will be fortified as per Mr. Hifumi's suggestion. 」
Apparently, there seemed to have been a discussion between Hifumi and Imeraria.
「 That's what I said too, but the princess agreed to the confrontation with Vichy, no? 」
「 …. If Vichy isn't destroyed, this country will be. Will Mr Hifumi be violent here and cause it to collapse internally? Or will the circulation of goods from Vichy stop and cause the same? 」
Imeraria sighed as though she had no options.

「 Oh, the great Viscount-sama returns. 」
Hifumi had made his way to the shop that the dwarf Thorn managed.
「 How did you know? 」
「 It's on a bunch of flyers, a customer showed one to me. 」
The document that Thorn thrust at Hifumi detailed "the actions of the hero Hifumi in saving a woman from Vichy and bequeathing upon him the title of Viscount as a lord to defend the new border between Orsongrande and Vichy".
「 Hmm, even the parchment isn't of bad quality. 」
「 Apart from, that, would you like to make purchases…. or rather make another strange object? 」(Thorn)
「 How rude. They are splendid battle tools. 」
While saying so, Hifumi pulled out several pieces of high-quality paper from his Dark Storage.
「 Hmph. 」
Bad attitude notwithstanding, Thorn's eyes sparkled with curiosity while looking over the papers.
「 What the heck!? 」
「 The dimensions are written there, as are the number of orders. 」
Blueprints for some tools and weapons were written on that paper.
「 Why do you want so much of this assembled? 」
「 If you want to see, come to Fokalore with me. The manner of fighting in this world. 」
「 Hmm, let me think about it. There are many orders, and the structure is quite complex. It will take around 2 weeks. 」
「 Do it in 10 days. 」
「 …. I'll have to call in an acquaintance. 」

After that, Hifumi went to the slave shop once again.
The same doorman was standing guard. He took one look at Hifumi and hastily scampered into the depths of the shop.
Almost immediately, the manager, Uraru came out of the shop.
「 Hello hello, Hifumi-sama. Thank you very much for remembering this humble shop, please come in. 」
Led inside by Uraru, Hifumi sat down and mentioned the same conditions as last time, strength, regardless of age or sex, in addition to a new one.
「 It may be difficult, but a bright fellow is preferable. 」
「 Ha ha ha! Certainly, there won't be many smart slaves… Oops, keep that secret from Origa and Kasha please. Well then, I shall make preparations at once. 」
After waiting for a while, Uraru returned and led Hifumi to a room with five people in it, of both genders.
Every single member was wearing simple padded tunics, all somewhat dirty.
「 These can read and write and count to some extent. 」
An embezzling bureaucrat, an accountant at a bankrupt hotel, various others who fell into slavery.
Talking to each one, addition and subtraction was possible, but few could do multiplication and division, it seemed to be the general standard for this world.
「 I'll buy them all. Clean them up and get them some new clothes on me. Bring them to the castle tomorrow. 」
「 Certainly. Incidentally, why would you want educated slaves? 」

They call this level educated? (Hifumi)
「 Preparations are very important to fight to the heart's content. That aside, are there slaves skilful enough with their hands as much as a dwarf? 」
Uraru respctfuly inclined his head to Hifumi's enquiry.
「 Certainly, there are. 」

Exultantly returning to the castle, Hifumi gathered his girls [TN: I'm tired of constantly writing all their names] and explained their next move.
「 In 10 days we will leave and go to Fokalore. It will be a routine visit of village territories. War omits nothing. 」
Hearing the word 'war', Alyssa flinched.
「 We will prepare till then, but first is the military unit formation. 100 men shall be divided into 4 corps, with a 30-30-30-10 composition. The last one will be the military supplies corps. 」
「 Mayor..? 」 [TN:'輜重隊' is military supplies corps, but is pronounced as 'シチョウタイ or shichoutai' that apparently can mean a bunch of stuff. mayor is what I've got.]
「 Huh?….. 」(Kasha)
Apparently supplies were carried individually in this world, a unit for cooking and supplies does not seem to exist here.
「 Well now, I guess I'll have to explain. That unit will carry materials and food, and do all the cooking. For the remaining 3 corps, Origa, Kasha and Alyssa will be the commanders for the first, second and third respectively. 」
「 C-Commander, it's impossible for me! 」
Hifumi lightly bopped Alyssa on the head as she stood up panicking.
「 The conventional methods of fighting are useless anyway, doesn't matter who the commander is. 」
「 Any of us are fine huh…. 」 (Origa)
「 No need to worry. In any case, you do not need to fight your opponent directly in the beginning. 」
「 What do you mean? 」
While answering Kasha's question, Hifumi pulled out a piece of paper and started writing on it.
「 If my expectations are correct, it'll be a siege that will involve the civilians as well. 」
「 The civilians…. 」
Origa was unable to continue, the silence filled with the sound of Hifumi's quill.

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Chapter 26 – Hush

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Since their decision to prepare for war in only a short while, Hifumi's daily life became quite busy.
He had to train the formation of the troops, prepare the equipment, design a strategy, and in addition read up on the documents related to Fokalore and its surrounding settlements after having become the new feudal lord of the area.
He had to come up with the future political measures, too.

"Maa, what will happen, will happen. The problem is the unaccounted-for expenditures. The question is how to handle it well in order to avoid bankruptcy…" (Hifumi)

Monopolizing one of the several conference rooms within the royal castle, Hifumi, without leaving the royal capital by even one step, passed his time performing his official duties from there.
Today there were 5 slaves he had purchased a few days ago from Ular within that room.
The slaves, who were suddenly brought to the royal castle, were driven by anxiety while they were assigned to different rooms split by gender. These hectic and severe circumstances were also caused by Hifumi, who without giving them any kind of instructions, had them do nothing but eating a gorgeous meal and sleeping.
And then, on the next day, after having seen the listings in the accounting book of income and expenditure of the Viscount's territory, which was delivered by Sabnak, who had been dispatched to the territory of the former Viscount Hagenti, Hifumi called for an assembly first thing in the morning.

"First of all, please sit down properly. Ah, not on the floor but on a chair." (Hifumi)

He called out to the slaves who didn't know whether such action would be fine and thus remained standing stock still.
After confirming that everyone was seated, he distributed several bound paper bundles to all of them by tossing them.

"Well then, now I will explain the work you are supposed to do for me. Well, although that's what I am saying, in a short while I will be going to war. In the meanwhile you will learn the things written on those papers." (Hifumi)

"Ano, master … what are these?" (Slave A)

To the question asked by a single female slave in a small voice, Hifumi replied with a serious look,

"Those are the textbooks I made for you." (Hifumi)

Hifumi had written down the methods concerning calculation by division, multiplication by using multiplication tables, percentage calculation, and calculation of size and volume. He also included a simple way of recording an account book. (E: *He made a* For Dummies *math edition? Genius!)*
Those were subjects which weren't used by anyone but scholars in this world.
Because they would be mostly dealing with taxes such as poll taxes, he didn't go as far as including difficult calculations.
Something like percentage was introduced by Hifumi for the first time in this world.

"I want you guys to work as civil officials in my new territory. For that reason, this is the least amount you have to

learn.” (Hifumi)

Tapping on the documents with his fingers, he said this to all of them while surveying their expressions.

“Ci-Civil O-Officials? Even though were are slaves …” (Slave B)

“If I can use them, it doesn’t matter whether they are commoners or slaves. I only went to Ular’s shop because it was the quickest and easiest way to gather talented personnel. If I meet another qualified fellow somewhere, I intend to employ them whenever possible.” (Hifumi)

After having listened properly to the speech you could call an explanation concerning the contents, the slaves frantically glared at the documents.
They were worried what kind of treatment they would receive if they failed here.

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The entire morning was spent on coaching the slaves. Afterwards it changed into self-study.
Quickly finishing his lunch, Hifumi left the castle and headed towards the training school in the back of the barracks.
Although calling it a training school, it was really nothing more than an excessively spacious vacant plot you wouldn’t expect to find within a city.
100 soldiers and Olga’s group were waiting there when he finally arrived.

“All units, line up!”

Raising a cloud of dust by their movement, 100 people straightened their backs.
The soldiers of each unit were already informed on their unit by official papers.
The first unit was compromised of infantry, the second unit of combat engineers, and the third unit of scouts.
Each unit consisted of 30 soldiers.
The other 10 soldiers belonged to the supply corps.
Up until now the division in Orsongrande was simply whether one was infantry or cavalry and whether they were nobles or commoners. Thus such organisation of troops caused bewilderment. However, Hifumi wasn’t worried about this matter in the slightest and simply ended it with the few words 「It works well, so we will do it like that」.

“Speaking frankly, because we intend to use the beginning of the war as training, be at ease and come along. Since I will kill the enemies, it is fine for you to just remember your own duties during the various military maneuvers.” (Hifumi)

As Hifumi gave such speech as substitute for a greeting, it obviously caused a commotion among the soldiers.
Even if there was a noble telling them to go to their death, that noble wouldn’t do it in such an easygoing manner.

“Hifumi-san, won’t the morale of the troops drop, if you put it like that?” (Kasha)

Having been released from the slavery contract, Kasha, who finally got used to the changed way to address him, smiled wryly.
The role of captain leading the first unit of infantry was entrusted to her.

“It’s fine. As it is often said, the will to act on something until death or to not do it, has nothing to do with having or not having morale. Especially since the combat engineers and transportation corps are positioned in the center and will be guarded by the foot soldiers, they will probably have a lot of free time.” (Hifumi)

Disregarding Kasha, who became sullen with such rejection, he started to explain to each unit their main duties and methods. Because of that, the second unit gathered close by. The other units were ordered to rush and dig holes while waiting for their turn.
With Origa in the lead, the second unit consisting of combat engineers assembled and stood in a line before Hifumi.

“Is there anyone with combat experience among you?” (Hifumi)

Because of Hifumi’s question, several people raised their hands. Listening to the battle circumstances of each of them in order, it turned out that they were similar for all of them.
To put it simply, the style was for the opposing parties to meet up on a plain, have their troops form lines and the let them clash simultaneously just like that.
Before the clash, each of the opposing commanders decided upon some kind of rule.
Among the engineers, there were some who participated in battles with the beastmen race. The beastmen surrounded them, who were advancing in a file, only to quickly strike them to decrease their numbers before fleeing the field. (T/N: *hit-n-run*)
Hifumi ended up being greatly perplexed.
He didn’t imagine the battles taking place to be nothing more than only such plain maneuvers.
In relation to the combat circumstances, you probably had to praise the beastmen race as superior all the way.

“I understand. Forget about all the combat experience you obtained up until now. Your duty is *to prepare in order to win the war easily*. You won’t hear from me such words as *Line up in a row and charge*.” (Hifumi)

“Prepare in order to win the war easily?” (Origa)

Origa, who stood in front, inquired in place of the baffled soldiers.

“Yes. I will now explain in what way we will be attacking the first town, so listen well.” (Hifumi)

From then on Hifumi explained to each unit what their duties were and which things they had to arrange.
Furthermore he taught them the training schedule until the departure.

“Since I will only be able to come and see occasionally, the captains have to manage things firmly.” (Hifumi)

“Roger!” (Alyssa)

Although Alyssa vigorously answered, the soldiers of the scout unit, which she commandeered, weren’t in a calm state at all.
The draft was for them to promptly seize the information about the enemy’s strategy.
Although that was only to be expected, it wasn’t performed in this world at all.
While listening to the talks of their combat experience, Hifumi considered that the beast race may use scouting, but since the enemies this time around where of the human race, he pushed these considerations into the corner of his mind.

“Well, since I am leaving now, I entrust it to you.” (Hifumi)

Although he was a man, who before long would officially become a viscount, he casually didn’t take any attendants with him and left for the castle town.

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The coming and going within the castle didn’t only include civil officials and knights, as it was the political center of the nation there were naturally a great number of high ranking nobles as well.
Many of them knew who Hifumi was and what he did on the day he came to this world.
Or rather, they witnessed his actions.
When they heard that Hifumi left the royal capital, they felt relieved for a brief time. Immediately after hearing that he would return then again, they wondered what kind of mistake it was this time for him to receive the treatment of a hero and become a viscount.
For the nobles, who were proud of their lineage, they thought of him as an intolerable greenhorn deep within their

hearts, although they didn't tell him that when they met him face-to-face.
On the contrary, they feared they would be the next ones to be killed by Hifumi if he heard of them speaking incautiously. Thus the topics gathering about Hifumi were only very few.
However, there was nowhere a person who wouldn't be interested in receiving information.

"Your Highness the Princess, appointing the man called Hifumi to a responsible post is a little bit too much, in my humble opinion …" (Debordo)

Visiting Imeria's office, a male courteous retainer performed a bow while stating this. It was a man called Debordo who was the second son of the Marquis Müntzer household, which governed the territory adjourning south of Orsongrande's royal capital.
(Truly a humble opinion, huh?) (Imeria)
Imeria almost ended up revealing what she was thinking as she watched Debordo while he was repeatedly criticizing Hifumi in front of her eyes.
By nature Debordo had a character that looked down on other people. Since he didn't have the corresponding ability to support his father in his work as Marquis, he earned the rank of vice captain of the third knight corps, which caused his inclination to grow even stronger.
It wasn't like the reason for that was his skillful handling of the sword, nor could you say that he was superior in his business either. Rather he was tossed into that place so he wouldn't cause harm to his surroundings for the time being. As he hadn't any experience as regimental soldier either and yet became vice captain just like that, he was under the impression that it was due to his excellent constitution.

"That gentleman is the hero of this country now. Receiving him coldly will provoke the masses into a revolt. Besides, while the trouble with Vichy is taking place, his strength will be essential in order to settle it." (Imeria)

"Something like the opinion of the masses, to say nothing about the fact that we are nobles, there is no need for Her Highness the Princess who is of royalty to do them any favors." (Debordo)

Is that guy really saying this? Imeria thought.
Viscount Müntzer is truly fortunate that Debordo isn't the eldest son.
The eldest son, who was a stepchild, was the type who handled everything flawlessly without standing out while doing so.
Debordo's tongue is often moving. (T/N: *He talks/boasts about himself too much as proverb, I guess.*)

"Please leave the matter of Vichy to me, then such things like a war will be finished in no time for certain." (Debordo)

Debordo's intentions are easy to understand. Imeria judged.
Resolving the friction with Vichy, which was caused by Hifumi's actions to begin with, he was intending to ask for Imeria's hand in marriage as reward for such an achievement.
His biggest rival, the eldest son of the Marquis Lagrain household, had died. Apparently he considered himself "on his own accord" to be the strongest candidate.

"Well then, let's leave this duty to him." (-)

It wasn't Imeria who called out to Debordo.
It was Hifumi, who came and entered the office performing an unnatural bow while smiling with a broad grin.

"You bastard, who do you think you are! Currently I am about to be appointed to an important mission by Her Highness the Princess!" (Debordo)

Debordo, who advanced matters arbitrarily, shouted, causing Imeria to sigh now.
In spite of blaming Hifumi earlier, he didn't even know the face of his opponent.

“It is the Hifumi from the topic just now. Leaving that aside, Imeria.” (Hifumi)

“What is it?” (Imeria)

“I dare say that this guy’s suggestion is a rather nice idea, don’t you think?” (Hifumi)

“B-Bastard! How dare you to speak like this to Her Highness the Princess!” (Debordo)

Being disgraced for not having known Hifumi’s face, Debordo, who turned red from the neck upwards due to anger, raised his voice loudly and tried to thrust Hifumi away. But the power he used to push the shoulder was used upon himself in return and he ended up falling to the floor.

“What a rude behaviour towards a marquis!” (Debordo)

“What are you talking about when you fell on your own? Furthermore, since you aren’t the successor, you shouldn’t use the name of the Marquis household either.” (Hifumi)

“Gu gu” (Debordo) (E: *Nonsensical stuttering*)

Finally reaching the limit of her patience, Imeria interjected before Debordo, whose dark red blood rose to his head, was able to spat out his next words.

“Müntzer, right now Hifumi-sama and I are talking. Restrain yourself.” (Imeria)

“B-Bu-But …” (Debordo)

“I won’t repeat myself.” (Imeria)

Having been told quite clearly, Debordo left the office while glaring at Hifumi as if he could kill him with no more than that.

“So, what kind of business do you have with me, Hifumi-sama?” (Imeria)

“I want to get your signature for this document.” (Hifumi)

With these words, Hifumi took the document out of the dark magic storage and passed it to Imeria, who took it while frowning.

“… Let me look at it.” (Imeria)

As for the document, it was Orsongrande’s request for reconciliation with the demand to hand over the spy Beirevra as suspect of the incident. This action was required before any kind of negotiation could be considered to begin.

“… Just this demand, this document substantially has no agreement at all.” (Imeria)

“Although I thought about it for a while, I couldn’t come up with any idea how to have Vichy discover and arrest Beirevra. I think this document will corner Vichy to a certain degree by sending it to the fellows in the central government.” (Hifumi)

“As soon as it is delivered it will give Vichy a reason to keep up appearance, right?” (Imeria)

“If they comply, that is, but …” (Hifumi)

Hifumi sat down in the reception prepared in the office and tossed one of the baked sweets, which were placed on the table, into his mouth.
The sweetness gently spreads within my mouth, as one should expect of the purveyor of the princess, it is truly

refined.

“That’s what you are saying, but you still intend to look for Beirevra.” (Imeria)

“I am a kind master, don’t you agree?” (Hifumi)

Even though that was the cause, he laughed as he stated it.

“Every person lives by killing, be it directly or indirectly, as they grow up. In their case, they were accidentally involved in the deceiving and cheating between human parties and thus they only decided to conclude this matter by killing the other party. Only in regards to the search, he is a troublesome opponent. Considering this, I only thought that it might be fine for it to become a popular odd job, if a useful reward was to be provided.” (Hifumi)

Looking at Hifumi, who threw another of the baked sweets into his mouth, Imeria picked up the quill and signed the document.

“In such a case I will gladly cooperate with you.” (Imeria)

While gently blowing upon the document for the sake of drying the ink, she murmured in a voice where it was uncertain whether he had heard it or not.

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And then 10 days passed and the the preparations were finished. Hifumi’s expeditionary force left the royal capital towards Vichy.
Doing it the usual way, he would have left the city magnificently drawing the gazes of the public upon themselves. Since that wasn’t Hifumi’s intention, they split up in several teams and left the city inconspicuously advancing on the main road before the night was lifted by dawn.
Such things like food and materials had been transported to the city Fokalore which was situated close to the national border. The luggage consisted of most of the soldier’s weapons and there were many wagons drawn by the Supply Corps sheltering a large amount of food.
In the first carriage Hifumi and Origa’s group, the three captains, were situated alongside Pajou who acted as the Princess’ representative and witness.

“… I am getting sleepy.” (Alyssa)

“The sun hasn’t risen yet either …” (Kasha)

Apparently Alyssa and Kasha weren’t yet fully awake.
Given that they will set a bad example to others as captains, it was the right decision to toss them into the first carriage, Hifumi assessed.

“Upon entering Fokalore, we will stop there for a night and then set out in the early morning again. Review the contents of the strategy properly.” (Hifumi)

“Um … It is the first time for me hearing of something like “strategy” but …” (Pajou)

For the knight Pajou Hifumi’s method of drafting seemed to feel awkward.

“There is no particular reason for you to do anything. Besides, concerning the general populace I am not overly interested in becoming something like a statesman. Even if I provoked animosity from the beginning, I realized that there are no obstacles in my own way of life, only that we would be chased for our life in a blink of an eye like that.” (Hifumi)

“But …” (Pajou)

“Pajou~” (Hifumi)

Stopping what she was about to say, Pajou looked into the eyes of Hifumi.
There were no friendly feelings there.
Just as he displayed on that night where they met for the first time, there was only deep dark and gloomy darkness as he killed people at that time.

“I won’t tell you that I am fighting for the sake of improving this nation or for its people. Just that there is nothing better than an abundant territory to satisfy my desire to fight. Although I don’t mind if you aim for such a country, but if you become a hindrance to me, I will kill you.” (Hifumi)

It had been a while since she had to face Hifumi’s bloodlust. Pajou didn’t even manage to sweat.
With a dry throat she was gasping to breathe painfully.
Somehow she managed to utter a few words without averting her gaze.

“… I, I will only witness this battle.” (Pajou)

“That’s how it is and that’s how it should be.” (Hifumi)

Finishing this talk, Hifumi jumped off the moving carriage and while running parallel to it, he skilfully climbed on his horse.
After Hifumi was gone, the heavy air within the carriage become a little bit lighter.

“Pajou-san” (Origa)

Origa called out to her as she was drinking water from a leather flask.

“… What’s up?” (Pajou)

“Pajou-san, you never been hostile to Hifumi-sama, isn’t that right?” (Origa)

The style of that question itself was a warning.
Without hesitation, Pajou replied.

“Since I am a knight of Orsongrande, I have to follow my duty.” (Pajou)

“Really? In case this duty causes you to become a hindrance to Hifumi-sama … please be aware of the fact that not only Hifumi-sama will become your enemy.” (Origa)

Closed in among the sleeping Alyssa and Kasha, Pajou wanted to transfer to riding a horse too.

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Chapter 27 – This is War

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Because Hifumi's expeditionary force had to replenish their supplies at Fokalore, they used the time to spend a night there. Deep in the night a group of about 20 people secretly left the city.
It was the third unit led by Alyssa.
For the sake of an advance mission, they went ahead and moved towards the national border.

"So, the reason is to kill the careless border company under cover of the night." (Hifumi)

For some reason the commander of the forces, Hifumi, was running as vanguard ahead of the third unit.

"I think usually you would wait with starting until both sides gathered their troops, but …" (Alyssa)

The one following right behind Hifumi was Alyssa.
Moreover, three rows side-by-side consisting of the 21 troops of the third unit came after them.
Including them, all of the expeditionary force were given orders by Hifumi to act in three-man-cells.

"Discard the usual way of thinking. It's not like we have to particularly watch out for some promise. No matter what you do while at war, the victorious side is justified. Don't forget that the losing side has to yield everything to the winner." (Hifumi)

"I-I'm sorry …" (Alyssa)

Aiming to suppress any sound, all of them were walking.
Hifumi wore something similar to order-made zouri[1] produced in this world as footwear. For all of the others he came up with the ingenious idea to attach cotton to the shoe sole of their boots in order to restrain the sound of foot steps.
Even so, although the foot steps of the troops were audible in their own way, Hifumi's practically couldn't be heard.

"Everybody, listen." (Hifumi)

Inserting a break during the walking, they had only half of the way left before arriving at the national border as dawn was closing in.
Everyone was breathing heavily. Only Hifumi was lightly breathing and remained calm.

"After this we will extinguish Vichy's war potential until dawn breaks. Before you are noticed by the enemy, kill them swiftly and in a reliable way. Everybody, take out your knives." (Hifumi)

Without hesitation all troops followed the order and pulled out their knives from their waist.
The backhand grip of the knives was a custom made article and had a single edge which was new to this world.
Of course, Alyssa took out the same as well.

"Just as you were taught. Predict the visual field of your opponent. Only aim at the throat. Don't make any sound. Don't raise your voice." (Hifumi)

While speaking Hifumi raised for each point a finger. Everyone nodded in silence.

“You were told the strategy before departure, there won’t be any changes. Go!” (Hifumi)

Without using any light, they vanished in turn, 3 soldiers each, in the direction of the border.

“I am off.” (Hifumi)

After making sure everyone left, Hifumi took Alyssa and went towards the border.
Different from the other troops, he boldly charged in from the front.
At the border fortress, there was a pathway going through on the Orsongrande’s side. Two soldiers were standing guard. The shining of the flickering and swaying torchlight could be seen.
Perhaps the rumors about going to war had already reached up to here. While paying undue amount of attention to the boundary to the Vichy side, they appeared to be quite tense.
There was no particular movement on the other side. The previously passing troops obviously had crossed the border without being noticed.

“Good work.” (Hifumi)

When they were suddenly greeted, they couldn’t help it but turn around.
In front of their eyes, Alyssa led by Hifumi appeared without holding any kind of light source.

“In the dead of the night … ?” (Soldier A)

“Maa, there are some circumstances.” (Hifumi)

With these words, Hifumi took out the passport and showed it to them.
It was a new document specifying him to be treated as viscount.

“This is … ! Excuse our impoliteness!” (Soldier A)

Straightening up his back, the soldier apologized. Hifumi lightly waved his hands in response.

“Don’t mind it. By the way, it looks like there is only two of you here, however, is it the same over there too?” (Hifumi)

Hifumi rose his finger pointing at the side of Vichy’s on the other side of the passage through the fortress.

“Huh? Yes, I heard that it is the custom for both countries to place a couple of guards at night-time.” (Soldier A, formal tone)

Given that the border was basically closed during the night, apparently the number of soldiers stationed was at its minimum.

“Is that so? Alyssa, I will take both of them down.” (Hifumi)

“Understood” (Alyssa)

Being doubtful of Hifumi’s and Alyssa’s conversation, the soldiers gave each other a sidelong glance. Steadily they were approaching Vichy’s side.
Before anyone noticed, there was a katana hanging on Hifumi’s waist.

“N? At such late time, who is it?” (Vichy Soldier A)

When the Vichy soldier turned around, his head was separated from his torso.

“If asked by anyone, currently I am an invader.” (Hifumi)

Swinging the katana before the other soldier was able to detect the drawing, he was slain before he was able to

show any kind of reaction.
The soldiers, who Hifumi's group conversed with in the back of the passage just now, watched with a shocked facial expression.
Looking back, Hifumi stored the katana while laughing.

"From this moment on the war has started. Convey this to everyone trying to cross the border. They should be aware that they will be dragged into it and die, too." (Hifumi)

While Hifumi was violating the national border at leisure, the soldiers in the barracks on Vichy's side were killed silently.
The three soldiers patrolling the surrounding of the buildings had their throats sliced open and were abandoned just like that. The remaining soldiers died never waking up from their slumber.
At dawn, when the main part of the expeditionary force arrived at the border, everything was finished. Hifumi was leaning with his back on the border fortress and waited for them. (T/N: Orsongrande side)
The other troops boldly took a nap in the border fortress on Vichy's side.
For the fist time experiencing a night attack, they were uniformly excited about it. Thinking about the influence on the military maneuvers from now on, Hifumi ordered them to get some sleep for now.
Seeing Hifumi's figure, Origa descended from the carriage and came over in a rush.

"Master! There are no particular problems with the main body of the expeditionary force to report!" (Origa)

"Understood. Well then, prepare for the military maneuvers on the Vichy's side of the border using the barracks as base. I will leave after eating lunch." (Hifumi)

"As you wish." (Origa)

Origa hurried back to her original position among the troops. Together with Kasha, they issued instructions to cross the border.

"Now then … I should take a nap, too, huh?" (Hifumi)

It wasn't only the troops, Hifumi remembered his inner agitation as well.
However, different from the soldiers, it wasn't due to the murdering a while ago, but due to the part of the coming battles.
He was preparing himself with the aim to act as violently as his heart desired.
He made a simple plan.
Even if his opponent didn't move as he wanted, in that case he expected it to become interesting and thus came up with a plan that was as simple as possible.
As he was thinking about such things, Pajou approached.

"I wondered whether you couldn't give me some information on the progress of the war." (Pajou)

"The soldiers of Vichy who were at the border, several tens of them, died. Our side incurred no damage." (Hifumi)

Hifumi answered her question smoothly as she was holding writing materials in her hands.

"I heard they were assaulted at the place they slept, but …" (Pajou)

"That's the reason why I chose a night attack. Quite obviously." (Hifumi)

Hifumi told her over his shoulder, as a matter of course. Pajou wasn't able to say anything else.
Likely, in the future, I think there will be much more happening in this war that exceeds my own comprehension. Reacting each and every time will only tire me out. Rather it's better if it's only getting tired as a single mistake by myself can easily end up with me being "disposed."

“… I understand. I will also take a small break.” (Pajou)

◆◇◆◇◆

It all started in the city near the border, Arosel, with the incident of a single young man visiting the mansion of the city’s representative on the last day.

“Is the representative of this city currently in?” (-)

A man suddenly appearing and without warning asking to be shown to the representative, the female servant got angry dealing with him.
Even under normal circumstances, for the sake of dealing with the document arriving from Orsongrande compelling them to allegiance, it was a strenuous effort to prepare the defense and consider the counter-measurements.

“Do you have an appointment?” (Servant)

At best it is someone without an appointment trying to sell something but still came around, I guess, the servant arbitrarily decided for herself exposing her displeasure in her words as well.

“Appointment, huh? I sent a letter a few days ago.” (-)

“A letter, huh?” (Servant)

In this world where there were monsters to consider in regards to the transportation network, the sending of letters was limited to only prosperous figures.
If the young man in front of me really is a visitor holding an appointment, I have made a mistake in dealing with him , the servant became anxious, but in reality that wasn’t the case.

“Ah, I asked whether he would become our companion and fight alongside us in the letter. I came here to listen to the reply to that.” (-)

Taking it out from his breast pocket, he showed a document to her. It was unmistakably an officially issued passport from Orsongrande declaring the man in front of her as an Viscount.

“Pl-Please wait a moment, Your Excellency.” (Servant)

Due to the totally unforeseen rank of the visitor, the servant shrieked with a shrill and nervous voice while rushing towards the office of the representative.
Hearing the report from her, the representative and the servants under him prepared in great haste to receive the Viscount.
No matter on what kind of reply he would decide, towards a noble, who didn’t take along anyone and came here by himself, the representative judged him to not be hostile and instructed that he should be handled courteously for starters.
In the meanwhile it was confirmed by a thin shaped servant from a distance, that Hifumi was the person, who had kidnapped the previous city representative Ortis and strangled him until fainting in order to obtain information out of him.
In the moment the servant saw his face, Hifumi turned towards the servant and faced him with a smile. The servant couldn’t stop to tremble and had to be taken to the medical office in the end.
Somehow or other Hifumi was invited to the reception room and sat down on the opposite side of a man called Kyulson, who immediately was inaugurated as city representative after Ortis passed away.
He was a merchant, in the mid-40’s, who had worked up his way in a single major company in his entire life.
Behind Kyulson was standing the female servant who had dealt with Hifumi at the beginning.
Somehow it seemed like she had the position of being his secretary.

“I have heard a little bit of rumor about Hifumi-sama already …” (Kyulson)

“I don’t need any roundabout greetings. First, let’s hear your answer. Then we can proceed the conversation from there.” (Hifumi)

Being interrupted in his attempt to exchange some modest greetings as opening, Kyulson’s nose became white. Although he wasn’t a noble in Vichy, he had often negotiated with nobles coming from foreign countries, including Orsongrande, in the past. Yet he didn’t meet such a noble until now.
Judging Hifumi’s youth, Kiyulson concluded him to be a noble rushing for results due to his scarce experience.

“I am very sorry. Related to the document delivered from Orsongrande, we unfortunately weren’t able to carefully examine it yet. Please wait for the reply until then.” (Kyulson)

Towards the harmless and inoffensive reply of not committing himself in any way while at the same time asking him to temporarily return until Kyulson could come up with his answer, Hifumi laughed scornfully.

“Fu, the local administration here takes it obviously quite easy. The representative was kidnapped and even though questioned whether they want to resist their ruin or join the other side, they weren’t able to come up with a decision on how to deal with it within a few days either.” (Hifumi)

“… I can’t believe this was said by the criminal himself, honestly … Hey youngster, I think you should behave more modestly even if you are a noble. You do realize that it would be fine to arrest you as a criminal here, right? Since I will close my eyes towards the amount of rudeness you showed here, go back now.” (Kyulson)

Dealing with Hifumi, Kyulson’s look and tone changed.

“I understand that you want to rush the results due to your youth, but you are 10 years too early to stick your nose into the exchanges between nations. In the first place, the documents from Orsongrande are an aberrant threatening letter. Meddling in our national politics just because of some brat who managed to somehow get some military gains due to committing crimes, is this document supposed to be a joke? Looking down on our government will sooner or later cause you a painful experience.” (Kyulson)

“I see, in other words you don’t intend to accept our demands.” (Hifumi)

“Of course not. Do you think that Orsongrande has the necessary military forces to invade into Vichy? Just considering the financial clout to fund the military forces, there is no way for Orsongrande to win a war in a direct confrontation. That already applies to only this city. We have plenty of defensive forces to deploy.” (Kyulson

Apparently Kyulson had judged Ortis to be the only incompetent person. He didn’t seem to acknowledge the value of Hifumi’s ability overly much either.
Pondering about this, Hifumi sighed while leaning back on his chair and staring at the ceiling.

“I see that you haven’t thought about it carefully. Do you know why I came here by myself? Did you believe that I am a fool who trusts too much in his own strength? Did you make light of me as a idiot that wouldn’t consider to be attacked?” (Hifumi)

“… What are you talking about?” (Kiyulson)

“I wonder which of us two isn’t taking the exchange between nations seriously. Every last of you, why do you conclude your opponent would attack in an easily understandable way from the front?” (Hifumi)

While talking the faint smile floating upon Hifumi’s face slowly stiffened due to his anger.

“You said you are called Kyulson. Didn’t you consider the possibility of me killing you here? For example, did you

think of the possibility of my subordinates secretly infiltrating and raiding the soldier posts in each place? Supposing that you lose all your pawns before the actual fighting begins, what will you do?" (Hifumi)

"I-Im-Impossible … But you haven't heard my reply yet!" (Kyulson)

Kyulson's face was soaked all over in sweat. He was nervous and his back became unsteady.

"This document itself was a plan to restrain your statesmen. You didn't notice until the end, huh? Although trust is important, going this far is like a splendid flower field.²" (Hifumi)

While talking, he stood up and took out the katana in a very natural behaviour and then thrust it.

"! … !?" (Kyulson)

The point of the katana pierced through Kyulson's lungs.
Watching him painfully breathing and scattering bloody vomit while thrashing about in agony on the ground, the female servant was dumbfounded. Falling on her bottom without grasping the reason for it, she just wept.

"Your representative will die very soon, what will you do?" (Hifumi)

"Pl-Please don't kill me … pl-please … I-I don't want to die yet …" (Servant)

Grovelling on the ground as the servant begged for her life, Hifumi's ardor was dampened and he returned his katana into its scabbard as he watched Kyulson's state, who had died unnoticed.
His eyes emptily staring with a facial expression full of anguish he died just like that.

"If you choose to not fight, announce it immediately in the entire city. This city has been annexed into Orsongrande from today onward." (Hifumi)

Going to the extent of declaring this much, incidentally several troops of the third unit burst into the reception room.

"Viscount, are you fine?" (Trooper A)

"Obviously. How did it go on your side?" (Hifumi)

"The disposal of all soldier posts has been completed without any problems, Sir!" (Trooper B)

While Hifumi had gone to the meeting with the representative, Alyssa, after gathering information on the soldiers posts, had secretly infiltrated the city alongside the third unit, which had dispersed in the vicinity. They assaulted the soldier posts almost simultaneously.
Several of them bore light injuries due to the resistance. All soldiers had been killed.
The female servant, who still didn't manage to get up, wore a face of disbelief listening to the contents of the talk.

"You heard it." (Hifumi)

"Y-Yes" (Servant)

"The possibility of using soldiers has vanished. Relay this news to the citizens with only the staff of this mansion. Do it right away. Tell anyone who wants to complain, to come here. So I can kill them." (Hifumi)

Although being hesitant, she quickly moved upon hearing Hifumi's words. To leave the room, the servant crawled on the floor in order to spread the information about the soldiers of the enemy nation while looking pathetic at the same time.

"What about the first and second unit?" (Hifumi)

“As planned, they are blockading all of the city’s exits, Sir.” (Trooper A)

“Good. I will go check the situation. 2 teams will remain here. In case the servants show unusual movements, kill them.” (Hifumi)

“Yes, Sir!” (Troopers)

Taking the other troops along, Hifumi left the mansion in high spirits.
In this way, they had performed the world’s first one-sided invasion. The history of Arosel as small-scale city-state ended and it changed into a simple district city.
This truth wasn’t only circulated amongst the surrounding cities but also reached the central government in no time.
Thereupon Vichy became aware of the situation for the first time.
It became a fact that Orsongrande really intended to go to war with Vichy.

Translation Notes

[1] Japanese sandals (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zōri)
[2] Some proverb? Not sure … but pretty much clear meaning either way.
キュルソン – Kiyuruson -> Kyulson

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Chapter 28 – Young and the Helpless

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Clown: And now~

Pierrot: ~ we would like to unveil~

Clown: ~ a tale of blood and war ~

Pierrot: ~ and fluffy ponies!

Clown: ~ yes, fluffy… what?

Pierrot: What?

Clown: Where'd you get fluffy ponies? What the hell are fluffy ponies?

Pierrot: Why, stuffed animals of course!

Clown: This is clearly the wrong novel to be discussing such cute things.

Clown & Pierrot: And a disclaimer! Please remember that this story is fiction! If you suddenly feel a desire to go on a killing spree please see a psychiatrist and a lawyer! Enjoy!

The two entrances to the city were blockaded by Hifumi's troops; and while one could enter the city if he consented to an inspection, no one was allowed to leave.
An infantry unit oversaw each of the exists, while the engineer corps set up an iron gridded fence–the grid being shaped in diamonds—so as to narrow the entrances. If needed, it could expanded or contracted.
The third corps—the scouts—moved between the guardhouse and the Manor ferrying information and documents; they would mingle with the crowd to gather opinions and rumors.
「There are no problems with the blockade. We prevented travelers from attempting to leave, but we do have citizens and merchants returning to the city. Although not one of them appeared at all suspicious, we cannot be certain that no one snuck in disguised」
Having heard this report, Hifumi ordered the troops to continue the blockade and the inspections, and departed into a city with a few soldiers following him. On the way he was joined by Alyssa, who would act as a guide.
「Why is it that we permit them to enter but not leave?」
Alyssa asked Hifumi while walking right beside him.
「The less we hinder exchange the better. As this situation continues the citizens will put up with minor inconveniences. However, if food and fuel stop entering the city, that won't last long. Should they fear for their lives, they will soon revolt. Thus, so as to minimize the impact on the city, I plan to allow entrance into the city.」
And since the people believe it's a temporary measure while the government is being changed, they shouldn't mind being unable to leave too much.
「And the longer it takes other cities to learn of the happenings at Arosel, the better」
While talking he continued onward towards the busy city center while confirming the propaganda posted

everywhere. Hifumi ordered city officials to post these to notify the citizens that they were now part of Orsongrande. Furthermore, in the marketplace and other highly populated areas he posted criers who declared the same news for those who could not read.
The crier would be replaced by another after some time; currently, the speaker was the woman in the reception room who had begged Hifumi to spare her life some time ago. Standing one floor above the rest, she emotionlessly conveyed the information to the public who had gathered before her.
「On this day, Arosel has become a part of Orsongrande. Presently, all are forbidden from attempting to leave the city; this ban shall be lifted soon」
「We're no longer a City-State?!」
「Where did all the soldiers go・・・?」
「There wasn't even a war, and the government suddenly switches sides! What treachery!」
「What will happen from now on・・・」
The citizens, oblivious to the actual situation, hurled insults and complaints at the criers; Hifumi, however, ordered that these remarks go unpunished and the people remain unoppressed. There is no problem if all they do is complain; once they realize that there is no actual effect on their daily lives they will quickly accept the change.
Hifumi passed through the crowd.
Seeing a gallant figure escorted by soldiers in never-before-seen uniforms, the citizens figured him to be the Orsongrande invader; however, as her merely was entering the public facility and was not acting violently, they silently watched him.
So far according to plan, Hifumi thought.
「Now… what to do about their remaining forces」
「Forces? No soldiers remain・・・」
「There are others. That's why I called for you, Alyssa, to guide me there」
「Where?」
「To the adventurer's guild」

Arosel's adventurer's guild is right outside the marketplace.
The guild is an independent agency within the state and is boasts some strength; however, they also maintain a level of cooperation with the state, and when the state falls into some crisis, they have always promised to help.
Of course, they could not be mobilized as any other military unit in case of a war, but they could be formally requested to help; and, driven by love for their country, many would rise to the task. Of course, there are also plenty loners among them—those who don't give a damn about what happens to this country or this city.
「We've come to meet you leader」
Hifumi said to the man behind the guild counter and showed him the guild card he had made in Orsongrande.
「Issued in Orsongrande・・・Hifumi-san, is it・・・huh?」
Seems like the identification was enough for the attendant to realize that the man before him was the one who had brought the city to his knees.
「That is・・・for what reason?」
「The country the guild deals with has changed. I've come to offer my greetings」
「H-however・・・」
「If the guild wishes to oppose me, that is fine. But」
Hifumi placed a wrapped package on the counter his escorts had carried with them. The adventurers in the guild, as if hearing the entire conversation, were closely watching the scene unfold before them.
Their eyes were package on the counter; Hifumi removed the wrapping, revealing its dreadful contents.
「Hiii・・・!」
The head of the city representative was neatly placed inside.
The anguish on the representative's head inspired such fear into those present that they could not even speak.
「If you want to oppose me, but one of us will end up looking like this」
「P-p-please wait a moment!」
Replacing the attendant who had fainted with foam coming from his mouth, a woman asked Hifumi to wait and

hurried inside.
「Hey, that・・・」
「So those posters hanging all over the place were for real, huh」
「Then this city is now part of Orsongrande?」
「But there was no mention of a war happening!」
The adventurers were quite noisy, but neither the Hifumi nor his escort as much as bat an eyelid at this noise.
Right before they had entered the guild, Hifumi ordered them not to act regardless of what happens; so, they simply didn't even recognize the presence of the adventurers. If someone needed to be killed, Hifumi would do it himself.
While waiting for the guild leader to arrive, as if he had noticed something, Hifumi asked his escort to wait outside.
「Me too?」
「Yeah, it's too cramped」
「It's too cramped?」
Tilting her head to a side, Alyssa said and left the guild.
During this exchange an old man came from the back.
「So you are the one who had come from Orsongrande・・・muh」
The old man groaned when he saw the head on the counter.
「News did come from the government・・・but to think it would end like this・・・」
「I'm Hifumi, the new head of state」
Ignoring the old man's groans and completely proceeding at his own pace, Hifumi said. The old man grimaced in return, but then nodded and responded,
「I am Lesh. The head of this guild」
Lesh was probably a mage. He had a white beard, wore a grey robe, and while his cane appeared simple, there was a jewel embedded into the handle.
「Now then, how are you planning to treat this city's guild・・・apologies, seems we have another customer」
「I am a member of this guild! Let me through!」
A young voice was heard from outside the guild.
With a loud noise the doors of the guild burst open and in came a tall lad clad in golden armor followed by two beautiful women. One of the women was robbed, had red hair, and a staff taller than her. The other girl carried a bow and had green hair.
「Lesh-san! What the hell is going on?!」
The lad ignored Hifumi and called out to Lesh.
「We were out hunting monsters and suddenly the city is filled with Orsongrande troops. What's going on?」
The robed woman followed up on the lad's comment. The woman with the bow was silent, but then noticed the head on the counter and quickly turned away.
The lad then noticed the head on the counter.
「W-what abomination・・・! Those Orsongrande bastards! Guys, we can just treat them as enemies now, right?! Now that I have returned let's launch a counter attack! We'll free the city from these invaders!」
(You're the only one who's so fired up, though)
After looking coldly at the lad's fiery speech, Hifumi addressed Lesh.
「Who's this bloody idiot?」
「He is the top adventurer at this guild, Calikoff. He is strong but lacks a composure」
「Oh, and can I take his words as the official stance of the guild?」
Lesh met Hifumi's gaze, and shook his head.
「No, all of our staff will serve you, Hifumi-sama. As for the other adventurers, it is their choice. We pray for your leniency・・・」
「Probably not going to happen」
Lesh closed his eyes at the response, and bowed his head as if praying.

A few adventurers decided to oppose Orsognrande's rule after hearing Calikoff's speech. As for Calikoff, after hearing about Hifumi from a nearby comrade, he faced Hifumi.

「So you are Orsongrande's representative, huh・・・taking the city by cowardly tricks and killing the representative are heavy sins. Withdraw your troops at once and pay for your crimes!」
He shouted with a serious face; Hifumi looked at Lesh incredulously and asked,
「Is this guy for real?」
Lesh sighed and addressed Calikoff,
「Calikoff, it has been decided that the guild with serve Orsongrande and Hifumi-sama. The city has already fallen, can you please no cause any more problems?」
「What rubbish!」
Calikoff replied engraged.
Little by little Hifumi grew annoyed.
「Ignoring all laws of war—who would yield to such tricks! Such actions could not possible be forgiven!」
「Forgiven by whom?」
「By justice!」
Calikoff replied to Hifumi's question.
「In that case, who decides that justice?」
「Justice isn't something someone decides!」
「And yet our definitions of justice differ. But this has gotten annoying. Hey, those who will follow this old man's command go over there. You're in the way.」
At Hifumi's command about half of the adventurer's went behind the counter. They were those who were completely unaffected by Calikoff's fiery speech.
「You guys, do you not love this city?!」
「Maybe they just hate how you force your views on everybody? Or they just hate you?」
Hifumi retorted and a few people reflexively nodded,
「Guh・・・ Very well, I will just have to show my justice with my actions! Now then, that's a sword on your hip, isn't it, draw it already・・・」
Without waiting for him to finish, Hifumi had already rapidly lunged at the robed woman behind him.
「Eh?!」
She did not doubt Calikoff's imminent victory so merely observed it as a sport, so she couldn't even react when Hifumi grabbed her head and crashed it hard into a wall.
Her body fell limply on the floor, her head clearly cracked. No one doubted that she was dead.
「F-Furiae」
While he was still muttering the name of his fallen comrade, the other girl just reached for her bow but lost her head in the process.
Her head rolled up to Calikoff's feet and stared blankly at him.
「Y-you bastard are・・・!!」
He never had the chance to finish the sentence.
The hand that was supposed to be grabbing his sword now ended at the wrist.
「Ueh・・・?」
Calikoff watched dumbfounded as blood flowed from his wrist, and Hifumi used the opportunity to stab him through the eye.
His brain thus damaged, he fell a corpse.
Hifumi's eyes darkened and he looked intensely at his blad.
「Hmph・・・it truly is more durable than a normal blade. Though I aimed at an opening, I still had to cut through armor, and yet not even a nick in the blade」
「C-Calikoff has・・・」
The other adventurers had now stood motionless, but Hifumi did not intend to let them off. If he did, they could go around causing problems, and, most importantly, they have already made their choice.
As if to check the quality of his sword, he continued slaughtering every single adventurer around him. Some were groaning without hands, some had their guts spilled onto the floor, some women were cut right in half, and some men now turned into bleeding daruma (limbless).

And surrounded by corpses Hifumi wiped his katana and again inspected the blade. Though he has caused such terrible carnage, he was not at all moved.
As for those watching this unfold, many lost consciousness. But every single one of them now felt nothing but fear towards Hifumi.
Lesh included.
Even Lesh who has led a long life of pure combat had never seen anyone so specialized at killing people. And one who could do it so naturally.
「And thus we got that out of the way」
Hifumi said and turned towards Lesh's group with a bright smile on his face.
「You won't be able to leave the city for a few days, but afterwards everything will return to normal」
「Umm, how should we pay the adventurer's from now on?」
「Do it as you have before. The only thing that has changed is the head of state. The city will run as it always has」
Saying that he'll send help to clean the guild up, they watched Hifumi leave; and not one understood for what purpose Calikoff and the rest had to die.

And thus even when Hifumi-dono's dominion would stabilize without many civilian casualties, and life returns to normal, there will probably be those who call Calikoff a hero and revolt.
「That's a darn shame・・・」
But looking at Calikoff's face, which stared back with only one eye, Lesh realized that he was not allowed to feel pity.

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Chapter 29 – There She Goes

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Hifumi occupied the cities and villages by the Orsongrande-Arosel border one by one.
Basically, the reason they captured Arosel the way they did was only for the soldiers to gain experience. In the other cases, he just had a small number of people infiltrating, where they either seized, or killed the representatives. The places that seemed to be able to offer some resistance were pinpointed and suppressed. The only matter where Hifumi personally moved were in regards to the guilds, where he had each of the guild masters swear allegiance to him.
After killing many of Vichy's soldiers and adventurers, Hifumi's side also had some casualties, but the difference in losses were overwhelming. Their raids were performed in such a way that most of the populace didn't notice anything. But even if they did, the only thing that changed was the name of the governor.
Except the ones resisting, the rest were let live. It was also made known that the only change in the administrative body was that Hifumi was now the chief. Except that, there were no changes, so nothing really went out of hand. At the moment there simply wasn't enough time for a complete restructure of the administrative system.
Except putting the central government's spies and liaisons on house arrest, Hifumi didn't really take any actions towards them. In time, they were to divulge the state of affairs within the their area of control.
In the meantime, three city states and ten of the surrounding villages were put under their control.
In each of the cities, the opposing parties were generally killed, and passage through the city gates was restricted. The soldiers left behind were the bare minimum for upholding those restrictions, so in the villages there could be as few as three of them.
"It's about time. Pajou. According to plan, after occupying this area, we are to establish a new national border. You should send for soldiers from Orsongrande to defend it."
Hifumi pointed his finger at the map they took from the representative of Arosel's mansion.
The place he pointed at was just a small-scale city named Rhone, but to get to one of the major cities in Vichy, you would have to pass by here. If they could set up a blockade here, one of Vichy's five major cities would be whittled away.
"Understood."
Until now, when the city they were aiming for was right in front of them, Pajou had been following Hifumi's orders.
Looking at the size conquered territory, the military gains were unprecedented in the history of Orsongrande. Furthermore, occupying these cities and villages in a relatively unscathed condition, the tax revenue would barely need to be reduced at all.
But doing it in this manner, which was a first for the knights, Pajou didn't think the aristocrats could possibly agree to it. If the head of the campaign wasn't Hifumi, and rather someone else, he would've been replaced long ago.
"Well then, I guess I'll go have a 'talk' with them in Rhone."
Seeing Hifumi straddling the horse and riding off on the highway alone, leaving the troops behind, Pajou was thinking about the future of Orsongrande.
Imeraria probably doesn't have the notion to invade other countries herself. If that's the case and Vichy wants to enter negotiations with us, offering Orsongrande an apology, it should all conclude there, but…
Would Hifumi agree to stopping at this point?
Would he listen to anyone's opinion, and change the way he's thinking?
…… In the end, would it all be over with Vichy as the only victim?
Pajou looked at the troops participating in the campaign.

They were all showing signs of fatigue. Having no experience with these methods until now, they were performing silent invasions, and engaging in one-sided slaughter. Sure, they had signs of physical exhaustion, but what had really exhausted them was the repeated killing of enemies, including many who couldn't even resist.

They were primarily concentrating on performing night raids and surprise attacks. Although they were operations in which the masses weren't hurt, in the end their purpose was still having others killed.
Exposing the Orsongrande knights and soldiers to this to the extent they were, what would become of them?
If they didn't stop soon, perhaps Orsongrande would crumble from within.
Origa couldn't understand Hifumi's real intentions, but didn't voice any opinions towards him. Alyssa didn't understand him either, but decided to keep following orders.
Perhaps if Hifumi was thinking about stopping…
Pajou was observing Kasha ordering the first unit around, preparing for the next assault. Among Hifumi's followers participating in the campaign, Kasha was the only one having shown uneasy expressions a couple of times.
"Sorry, do you have some time?"
When Kasha seemed free for a little while, Pajou quietly asked her.
Closing in on Rhone, Hifumi frowned.
The smell of blood drifted over from the wind. The town's entrance came into sight, but there were still no presence of people.
"What's all this about…?"
Speeding up the horse, Hifumi tightly held onto his katana fixed on his waist. The left hand was propping up the scabbard, making him able to draw at a moment's notice.
Steadily closing in on the city, a bizarre mud wall covering the entrance came into view.
Carefully approaching, he confirmed that a mud wall that was as hard as rock was completely covering the city entrance. Making sure that no one was around, he swung his katana, destroying the wall.
A stench of blood and decay burst forth the moment the entrance was cleared.
"So they were completely annihilated."
Looking around within the city, decomposed bodies were scattered all over the place, no living things to be found. Not even cats or dogs. Whether it be the stores, the inns, or even the regular houses, blood and dead bodies could be found everywhere.
Hifumi had an uncomfortable feeling. He judged that they had been dead from anywhere between a few hours and a day, but several patches on the corpses were extremely decomposed.
"A disease? …No, that doesn't seem to be the case."
There were several bodies that hadn't decomposed yet, seemingly having died due to blood loss from the wounds on their necks and various other places. But these corpses looked suspicious as well. Their fingers and fingernails looked too clean. They should obviously have 'been killed', but there were no indications of resistance, and their faces were anything but warped in horror or pain. They were completely expressionless.
He didn't understand the circumstances of the deaths of the decomposed bodies, but there were numerous cases of their throats having being clamped down upon, and clawing their own chests.
Most likely, something made them unable to breathe, and as a result, they ended up dying.
Hifumi abruptly withdrew his katana, as the stomach of one of the decomposed bodied opened. Some gas emerged, and the content gushed out with a splashing sound.
"The intestines are also extremely decomposed, but it seems that what's inside the stomach is still fine."
As Hifumi guessed that for some reason, they all started quickly decomposing at around the same time, he caught a quick glance of something through one of the bodies' split clothes.
"Isn't this the same magic tool that Gorilla-like guy was wearing?"
Wouldn't that indicate that this incident was orchestrated on the orders of Horant?
"… For the time being, we can't use the city unless we clean up."
Not being able to conclude anything more than that, Hifumi let out a sigh and returned to the where the campaign's forces were stationed.
When the soldiers first saw the city with the corpses spread all around, they were speechless. *'You took it this far?'*

their gazes seemingly tried to convey, as they concentrated on Hifumi.
“In that short amount of time, he killed this many?”, someone muttered.
In order to avoid diseases from breaking out, Hifumi had them dispose of the corpses by burning them, and then burying the bones.
“What is actually going on here?”
Having surveyed the surroundings, Origa asked Hifumi.
“No idea. The decayed guys were wearing that body strengthening magic tool we encountered before. Perhaps they were made to wear them by someone. The other ones had no facial expressions, so it appears to be the same kind of magic tool as the soldiers in Arosel were using. The low levels of resistance would indicate that this should be a strengthened version.”
Having said that, he had now seen the strengthening magic tool a few times by now, but this time he had noticed a few things he hadn’t back in Arosel.
He turned to Pajou who was situated a small bit away.
“Pajou. The soldiers from Arosel were using some kind of magic tool on the orders from their government, do you know what kind of tool it was?”
“No. I didn’t think they were having a uniform magic tool they were equipped with…”
“But when you heard about it in Arosel, didn’t you think that… Hmm?”
“Is there something wrong?”
“I feel a strange smell.”
Hifumi turned around, and walked towards one of the city’s wells. Origa and the rest followed him to take a peek into the well and sniffed to check the smell. It was an acidic smell that slightly stung the eyes.
Throwing in the bucket and withdrawing some water, there was nothing wrong with the color of it, but it was undoubtedly the source of that smell.
“…… Are there any magic tools that display an effect when you’re drinking, for example?”
“I haven’t seen one myself, but I’ve heard others talks about them existing. What about it?”
“For example, let’s assume we have a magic tool creating a substance that spreads throughout the body. If that substance could dissolve in water, what would happen when you drink water?”
“I don’t know if you could get the same result or not, but…”
“That’s why they needed to experiment with it, right?”
Both Origa and Pajou turned quiet.
Destroying a while city just for that purpose. That kind of deranged thinking made them shiver in a different way than when they were facing Hifumi.
“It’s probably the same kind of strengthening magic tool the border guards used. The ones we smashed. While they were doing experiments all over the place, it seems like they migrated somewhere else.”
Possibly because of Beirevra, Hifumi thought, but he had no positive proof that was actually the case.
“Tell everyone to not use the water from the well. Send someone from the third unit to make sure the water from the river close by is okay. Pajou, send a report back to Orsongrande. I don’t mind if you’re using one of the soldiers to do that.”
If, after the messenger delivered the report, everyone hearing became spineless, it wouldn’t be a laughing matter, Hifumi sighed.
Staying in Rhone for three days, they were steadily coming along with the preparations for fortifying the new national border.
The entrance on Vichy’s side of the city was changed slightly. Only on the inside of the gate was a guard room prepared. The guards who had previous experience in guarding a border were put in charge of the central positions.
Furthermore, the second unit made a simple moat on Vichy’s side of the city. Closing in on horse, they would have to to take a long detour.
“It’s about time. Alyssa, since we’ve now established the new national border, have the third unit convey to the troops in the occupied cities and villages that they can now release the restrictions on entering and exiting the cities.”
“Roger!”
“Pajou, you make the preparations to receive the troops from Orsongrande that are to be stationed here. There are

a lot of houses remaining, so seizing a few inns to use as well should be enough. No one should complain about that, right?"
"Understood."
"The second unit is to continue the investigations within the city. If there are any survivors, take them into custody."
"Will do."
"What about the first unit?"
"They should get accustomed to defending the border for now."
Having issued all the orders, Hifumi felt worn out and told the others he'd lie down for a while, after which he headed towards a suitable inn.
"With this, we're done with the first step, aren't we?"
Kasha muttered, stretching her back.
"Yeah. But we still haven't achieved our own objective, have we?"
Only after dealing with Beirevra would they have taken their own revenge, Origa mentioned. It was something the two of them had talked about many times already.
"About that…"
Kasha put her index finger to her cheek and said in a small voice, not meeting Origa's gaze.
"We've already been released as slaves, and continuing like this, I don't know how many more people we have to kill before we reach Beirevra… I also thought it's about time we returned to our primary professions……"
For every word Kasha said, Origa's eyes turned more severe.
"I-I'll return to the rest of the unit!"
Not being able to withstand the mood turning heavier, Alyssa ran away.
Pajou really wanted to do so as well, but this was the situation she was looking for. But more than just having it happen, she had to see for herself how it would unfold, so she stayed to listen to their conversation.
"Kasha, you may have some valid points in what you say, but I didn't think you were this dishonorable."
"Hi-Hifumi giving us our freedom back is amazing, I'm not saying it isn't! But we're adventurers, so originally our enemies were the monsters. Killing people is just… I just think that's wrong."
"If that's the case, you can return to the capital by yourself. I'll still be following Hifumi."
"Ah…"
After that, Origa turned around and walked away at a quick pace.
Kasha stretched out her right hand as if to stop her, but grabbed nothing but air.
"I'm sorry. I made you do something unpleasant."
"It's fine. We aren't fit to command soldiers like this in the first place. Origa will eventually come to understand that as well. I'm thankful towards Hifumi, but that's not reason enough to do this for an extended period of time… And honestly, for her own sake, Origa needs to realize that Hifumi isn't a person that's good to always stay close to."
"Yeah, I understand you as well."
If Hifumi knew about Pajou's goal, how would he react? He's a person who doesn't care about others, so perhaps he wouldn't say anything if a comrade decides to leave. But what would happen if they do something Hifumi would regard as treachery, or hostility?
She might not be able to return to her own country, or perhaps even die. But even then, Pajou was determined to weaken Hifumi's faction. He had become a hero, and brought both triumph and benefits to Orsongrande. But what they've gotten so far was enough. They didn't need more.
This is for the selfish sake of those politicians, but if you're going to resent someone, please just hate me
Walking back towards the assigned lodgings, Pajou had now decided on something she wouldn't report to the princess.

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Chapter 30 – From the Inside

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Clown: “I-it’s not like I translated this chapter for you or anything… b-b-b-baka!!!”

Although they solidified the national border, many of the new fortresses belong to Orsongrande in name only—they are unoccupied.
The invasion so far, primarily due to the fact that preventing people from getting out also slowed down the speed at which news travel, has continued without much opposition from Vichy.
And now, via these fortresses, some people are leaving Orsongrande for Vichy.
Hifumi, who observed this happen, merely marveled at how few actually emigrated.
Yet their hesitation to leave their home cities and villages is predictable: the roads are underdeveloped and their only means of substance comes from the businesses they took years if not generations to develop.
The only who do travel are the seconds sons, the unemployed, and the wealthy.
「Frankly, I thought you might just decide to massacre everyone…」
Kasha said, while partaking with Hifumi the lunch the supply corps prepared
「Civilians are not the enemy. Only the enemy needs to be slaughtered. But fighting tens or even hundreds of soldiers is inefficient and boring. Instead, it’s best to force those Vichy bastards to become afraid and to strengthen their ranks with more people. Then, they might finally come at us for real」
「・・・If they do, wouldn’t we lose?」
Alyssa was there among them. Only Origa and Pajo have not returned from their respective tasks. In fact, Origa has been intentionally avoiding Kasha since yesterday.
「・・・Right, we might lose」
「Huh・・・?」
Kasha froze mid-bite at Hifumi’s nonchalant declaration.
「The soldiers here have only crammed knowledge of infiltration and assassination. Even if they had any worth as soldiers before, they would simply be overwhelmed numerically」
「But then, what should we do?」
「We’re fine as long as we don’t fight them head on. We need to dictate the environment and attack them after dividing them into smaller groups. Besides, we don’t really need to wait for our enemy to gather their forces, and even if they do, we just need to have them scatter a bit」
But should there be a person more capable than I among them we’d lose, Hifumi concluded while putting the last piece of meat in his mouth.
「But they teach soldiers never to consider defeat・・・」
Alyssa murmured, and Hifumi rebuked her,
「Don’t be a fool: how could you think of cutting someone down without considering being cut down?」
「Says a guy who could easily cut down hundreds」
「A hundred may not pose a problem, but I too am human. I too need to rest, and I cannot fight continuously for many hours. If I fail to dodge even a single slash out of fatigue, I will die. No matter how strong you become, this fact never changes」
That is why killing is just as fulfilling as living, Hifumi said.
These words were imprinted in Kasha’s mind: even these monster of a human considered death.

After lunch, Hifumi observed the border with Alyssa, and called out to three men attempting to leave.
「Yo, could you wait a minute?」
「O-oh my, Viscount-sama」
The first of the three burly men responded to Representative Hifumi.
「You are spies from Vichy, aren't you?」
「N-no, we are simple traveling merchants・・・」
Wiping the sweat from his brow the man replied, but Hifumi grabbed his hand and pointed to his palm.
「Merchant's don't have hands like this. Drop the obvious lies」
The smile on the man's face disappeared, and his looked down, serious.
「As expected of the Expeditionary Force General, I presume. I applaud you. I am indeed a spy deployed by Vichy's Central Council」
While this man was already in Anarazel city when it was occupied by Orsongrande's Expeditionary Force, he was away from the representative's manor and thus avoided capture. So he pretended to be a merchants and sought to join others on his return to Central.
「Seems like I am fated to perish here. These two men are indeed in my employ, but I have hired them here—they know nothing about my purpose. I beseech you to have mercy」
「What are you doing talking to me like I'm some homicidal maniac? I didn't stop you to kill you. You're headed to Central, so I wanted you to deliver something for me」
「A delivery, you said? Should I… Should I hand it to the Council?」
Once the spy noticed the document Hifumi took out, he immediately realized it was addressed to Vichy's government.
「Yeah, so after they get a grasp on what has happened here, I need the response to this letter… let's say twenty days from now」
Since it takes seven days to reach Central from here, he gave them plenty of time.
「・・・Understood. I have matters to report to Central, so this shall be no problem」
「Your name?」
「Vinu, your grace」
「Now then, Vinu, these documents are important. Don't go and get killed by a monster or something」
「Understood. I shall deliver the letter without fail」
Vinu bowed, reverently accepted the letter, and set off towards Vichy.
「Hifumi-san, what's in that letter?」
Alyssa, who up until quietly observed, asked out of curiosity.
「・・・Right… well, I guess it's fine」
Hifumi said after concluding that nothing will change even if she were to know now.
「So you know there's this man that Origa and Kasha are looking for—Beirevra? Apparently he's one of Vichy Council's spies. Rather than having to run around all of Vichy looking for him, it's a demand to have him extradited」
Hifumi could only laugh thinking that this document had Imeraria's signature on it. Now, Vichy could simply blame Beirevra as the cause of his war, or respond in silence and face condemnation as a country that harbors criminals. One way or another, they were being pressured.
「So their choice is either to sacrifice Beirevra to appease Orsongrande or attempt to push us out with their military might」
「So what will we do for now?」
The answer was not due for another twenty days, so they had lots of time. Hifumi decided to take that time to carefully tour his dominion.
「Reinforcements are bound to come from Orsongrande soon. I'll leave the occupied territory to them and go see my land」
「Should I come along?」
「Do as you wish」

The following day reinforcements arrived to the frontier and, while strengthening control over the new territory,

decided to convert the town of Rhone into a military base.
The Expeditionary Force, now relieved of their duty, were scheduled to patrol Hifumi's domain.
That day Hifumi gathered his troops and announced their return to Fokalore.
「I have matter to report to the royal capital, so I shall return there」
Pajo stated, and Hifumi nodded in understanding.
Kasha, fidgeting about, timidly continued,
「Umm… if it's not a problem, I too would like to return to the capital・・・」
Origa remained silent but looked at Kasha with an ice-cold glare.
「You mean to quit the military? Have you abandoned your revenge?」
Kasha cleared her throat and responded to Hifumi's question.
「Thanks to Hifumi-san's and Imeraria-sama's efforts, I have regained my freedom and even killed the soldiers responsible… so how do I say this, I think I have exacted my revenge already. Frankly, I'm just tired, I want to go back to my carefree adventuring days」
「If that is what you wish for, then so be it. Follow with the squad until Fokalore, and feel free to do as you wish from there」
Hifumi said, and looked at Origa. He had thought that Origa wanted to the same, but she remained silent.
「Is that alright? Weren't you together for like forever?」
Alyssa said but regretted it immediately, praying to take back what she had just said.
「It wasn't even that long. I merely bought and used them; our goals merely overlapped. That is all」
As long as they themselves chose their path, it didn't bother Hifumi that much, but then Origa stated,
「I will follow Hifumi-sama! No matter how much suffering lies ahead, this life was saved by Hifumi-sama. I will follow you until the end!」
「・・・Do as you wish」
「Yes, I will!」
Watching this, Pajo could not understand why Kasha recoiled at those words as she did, but she clearly saw that Origa's loyalty to Hifumi only deepend.
(Perhaps she too is a danger)
She might become a second set of eyes for Hifumi, smelling out dangers that lie ahead. Perhaps she had to eliminate Origa first.
Being deep in thought, Pajo noticed a bit too late that Hifumi's glare was focused on her.
「・・・What is it?」
「Thinking things through is alright, but watch your step. Some who think to hard tend to do the stupidest things」
「I-I see. I will keep that in mind」
Pajo's pulse quickened at his warning, as she could not figure out if he had figured her thoughts out or not.

「I wonder if the country is just trying to kill me…」(Sabnak)
After reaching Fokalore after a few days of travel, they were met with but a ghost of Sabnak.
Managing the reinforcements for the Expedition Force and ferrying Pajo's reports, managing Fokalore's affairs and negotiating for troops, all of these matters – none of which befit a knight – fell on poor Sabnak's shoulders.
「Anyways, I am glad that you have returned, Hifumi-san. I can finally return to the capital」
Sabnak exclaimed, laughing with tears streaming down his face, thinking of how he could finally hand over the office and affairs of late Viscount Haagenti to Hifumi. All of Haagenti's officials and servants were either eliminated or escaped, so even living in the manor was a challenge.
「How are the civil slaves I bought?」
「Civil *servants* you mean… they have already arrived. They have spent every waking hour silently digesting the information you gave them. I have briefly looked at their work and must admit that it exceeds my own education.」
And nonchalantly dismissing the question of whether that much education was even necessary for them with a "those are just basics," Hifumi responded,
「If the civil slaves are ready to take over the affairs, feel free to join Pajo and Kasha on their return to the capital. If there are any soldiers who wish to accompany you, please take them along」

「Understood.」
The major points were summarized well: economic situation was stabilizing rapidly, faction representatives abstained from any major action, certain statesmen have been replaced, and a list of merchants entering and exiting the domain was compiled.
「Aren't you fit for this kind of work more than that of a knight?」
「Please, don't. I'm a knight. And after returning to the capital I intend to rest for a while. It's unnatural for a person to spend so many nights awake」
Representatives have been changed in the past and normally these take control of their land immediately; but never before has there been one like Hifumi who immediately set off on an expedition.
「About that… I assume you know… but you have heard about the town destroyed within Vichy, right?」
「Yes, the news of that matter and the possibility that magic item was used is known here」
「Well, about that… you've been assigned to investigate that case」
「Uehh?!」
「That's what the captain of the reinforcements asked me to tell you; at least investigation of magic items fits a knight」
Hifumi said while smiling and sipping tea. Tea was prepared by a proper maid, so it made even Hifumi relax.
Feeling as if he's been influenced by this world too much, Hifumi placed down his cup and sighed.
「C-can't you leave it to Pajo-senpai?!」
His dreams of a rosy vacation drifting further and further away, Sabnak was in a state of panic; Hifumi, however, merely stared at the ceiling.
「Pajo, huh… You know how she is, she is probably busy working for the queen」
The ceiling was decorated with carved lumber, with the depictions of dragons and phoenixes visible. These beings too are present in this world.
「For Imeraria-sama's sake, you say?」
Sabnak turned his head and was met with Hifumi's laughter.
「Yeah, and a big job I bet it will be. Now then, how about I meet the slaves. They'll get busy from now on as well」
「Huh? Ah, understood」
Hifumi started for the door, but then stopped.
「By the way, how many soldiers does Orsongrande have?」
「Soldiers? Those loyal to the crown number around 10,000; under the control of the nobles there may be up to 30,000 more」
「Hmm~」
「Oh, and there are currently three thousand soldiers stationed at Horant. Why do you ask?」
Sabnak answered as if trying to shoot down any requests for additional troops. But that is not why Hifumi asked.
「Not to increase our troops. If there are more people, it's easier to trip over. "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles"」
「・・・How do you mean?」
「You'll see」
Without turning to look at Sabnak, Hifumi left the room.

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Chapter 31 – This Love

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Hifumi was notified to return to the capital for an informal conferring of a peerage.

Such simplicity is fine, huh? Listening to the messenger, this was the style during war. You could say it was an official reason in this case.

I think there is no necessity to expressly return from the front. You could consider this no more than a regulation. Actually, it seemed to be the first time for Hifumi to rise in nobility by this method.

“Maa, since Pajou is heading toward the castle currently, I doubt she wants me to accompany her.” (Hifumi)

Although Hifumi could vaguely guess Pajou’s motive, he didn’t plan on dealing with it in any special way.

As he didn’t really consider Orsongrande an enemy nor did he judge them to be allies either, he didn’t particularly care which path they would choose.

The state being as it is, Hifumi officially became the feudal lord of the central viscount territory of Fokalore. The mansion of the former feudal lord of Fokalore became his residence from now on.

Since he wasn’t very concerned about the place he lived, the new maids he had employed only were to clean as he decided to use all of the rooms without changing them.

Even though Hifumi said it would be plenty for him to use a small room like the servants used, he was persuaded by Sabnak that if the feudal lord were in such situation the servants rooms would end up shrinking even more. Thus, the result was that he would use the room Hagenti used before.

Incidentally, Origa and Alyssa also received a room for living in the same former feudal lord mansion.

The two were given rooms that were originally used by the former feudal lord’s relatives. Alyssa swiftly decided on an extravagant room to live in, but she was unusually bewildered having her circumstances being taken care of by maids.

From the time Origa returned to Fokalore she stayed close to Hifumi almost as if her position was to be his secretary. She also aspired the room next to Hifumi’s room. Thus she was finishing her work vigorously. *(E: Really wants that mistress position, huh?)*

Although one part of the expeditionary force returned to the capital, the majority of above 80 people stayed behind.

Revising from their organisation during the war, they divided into 4 groups to guard the territory, maintain the public order, and practice all kinds of things. They changed into a simple way of performing a relief rotation and decided to conscript new recruits from within the territory.

Alyssa was employed as army manager while Origa was employed to manage the civil officials. Merely for form’s sake Hifumi arranged this shape of system for now.

By the way, as Alyssa was anxious to manage the troops by only herself, a single woman called Miyukare, who was originally a civil official in the capital amongst the civil official slaves, was assigned as her assistant.

These decisions up until here were made and notified as they decided to move towards Fokalore. After arriving at Fokalore these were immediately realized.

◆◇◆◇◆

And now, in front of Hifumi, four of the slaves took a written test while eagerly sitting at a desk.

The objective was to see the results of finishing the provided assignment.

Given that Miyukare secured the duty of being Alyssa's assistant, only the remaining four had to undergo the test.

As it would affect their own future, all of them were desperate.

"Alright, it's time. Everyone put down your pens." (Hifumi)

The scratching sound of filling in the papers ceased and without knowing who it was, the sound of breathing out could be heard.

Since it was merely the portion of four people, Hifumi collected the sheets of paper without delay and graded them quickly.

"Alright, maa, I guess it's fine. All of you will operate as civil officials under my direct control." (Hifumi)

After checking the answers of the test, Hifumi tossed the papers on top of the desk and looked at everyone while talking.

"I'm so glad…" (Slave)

A single woman muttered while the others had a relieved facial expression.

"Well then, I will now explain regarding the organisation of this city's administration. As it isn't a city of significant scale, it isn't feasible to make anything but a simple structure. The five of you, you guys and Miyukare, will play a leading role in the administration of this city with Origa on top. As you know, Miyukare will be transferred to the troops. Depending on the situation she will bear the duty of mediating with the administration. Caim *(T/N >> Kaimu <<)* and Brokra *(T/N: >> Burokura <<)* will carry out the budget compilation as well as tax collection. Paryu *(T/N: >> Pariyu <<)* will manage the creation of a family register. The administrative guidance related to commerce and industry will be done by Doelgar *(T/N: >> Douerugaru <<)*. As I will steadily hire personnel, I will appropriately divide them and assign them to you guys." (Hifumi)

"Ano … What is a family register?" (Paryu)

The youngest woman among the slaves, Paryu, raised her hand.

"Ah, now that you mention it, I didn't explain that." (Hifumi)

Hifumi had heard from Sabnak roughly about the tax system in this world.

From each farmer in a village around half of their annual harvest would be collected.

From the merchants a fixed amount of money would be annually collected depending on the scale of their business and the merchandise they dealt with.

As for the other members of the general public, a staff member would annually collect a poll tax depending on the

town.

Although Hifumi said there were many leaks like that, since there were only few people who could calculate, Sabnak mentioned with confidence that this degree of taxation was the limit of what was possible.

“It is work that investigates who and where someone is living and compiles this information. Certainly, because there is obviously no concept of addresses or such either, most of the personnel will be at first sent under your supervision. After explaining the details, they will attach a number to all plots of land and houses within the city. Furthermore they will check up who lives there and what kind of occupation they have. And then you will hand this information over to Caim’s group. This will become the basic information in order to collect the taxes.” (Hifumi)

He also explained that the performance of the administration services was based on the information obtained by receiving reports about birth and death.

Although Paryu had a face which likewise could mean that she understood it or didn’t, after listening to his explanation she nodded in assent.

“Even though I have the work called ‘guidance of the commerce and industry,’ what would be good to do there?” (Doelgar)

The next question came from Doelgar, a middle-aged man with a bearded face.

“Generally it is to make a guild for every type of industry. Each craftsman and store should be coordinated through them by giving them instructions depending on the situation of the industry and the instructions from the administration. Also, those guys who are unemployed will be efficiently sent to the places, which don’t have enough hands, as manpower by the guilds.” (Hifumi)

“I see.” (Doelgar)

Doelgar seems to have understood it quickly.

“And, before long there will arrive several dwarf slaves at Fokalore. Since they are able to somewhat produce some things as well, we will distribute those goods, which have become our specialty, through the guilds in the country’s market. Everything in regards to that I will entrust to you.” (Hifumi)

“I have understood.” (Doelgar)

Furthermore, such things as tax collection and tax rate, he explained to everyone the details of what he planned during the war. As soon as the family register information was gathered, he would announce the change of the tax system.

In order to validate them, each of them would be given a private room in the feudal lord’s mansion to serve as office and would have an exclusive maid assigned to them.

All of them were perplexed by the treatment that was no different from a noble.

“You can interpret it as your work being this level of demanding and intensity.” (Hifumi)

After these words some became scared while others showed their determination.

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That day the dwarves arrived in the city, they prepared the tools for the construction work in the city and were shown the blueprints while receiving the necessary explanations. The instructions were about the new buildings like the police box, where a smaller amount of guards could be stationed unlike a guard office in concern of the the city’s

security. Hifumi was vigorously going through the entire city.

As new feudal lord he walked through the city on his own feet. Even though the city's inhabitants were bewildered in the beginning, it reached the point that they greeted him as they gradually memorized his face.

Although Hifumi frankly thought of it as troublesome, considering that they had provided the money and materials for the sake of the war, it naturally turned into him improving his acceptance of the matters regarding his governmental position.

"Somehow your mood has become a bit more gentle." (Origa)

Origa smiled while making black tea for Hifumi.

Except during work, Origa is always besides me, Hifumi thought while becoming aware of it.

"Is that so? Maa, because I have become a feudal lord there are no fellows lunging at me. Vichy hasn't made a move yet either. Even though it would be irritating for it to be continuously peaceful as it is now, it will become a large war very soon anyway. I think it is fun to prepare for that." (Hifumi)

However, it is was also a fact that he grew tired from the several days of peace.

As he was spending hours inside to lead the government which he wasn't used to, he felt that the scent of battle vanished.

There was once again a hunch welling up that he wouldn't be able to kill similar to the anguishing time he felt when he lived on earth for ten-odd years.

"That … I heard from Alyssa." (Origa)

Towards Origa's voice he returned his consciousness from his deep thinking.

"What?" (Hifumi)

"It's about the matter regarding Hifumi-sama sending a written letter in order for to the central government of Vichy to hand over Beirevra. Thank you very much." (Origa)

Given that Alyssa is apparently often consulting with Origa, I guess she heard about it then.

Although I didn't plan on hiding it either.

"We don't know yet what kind of effect it will have. There is no guarantee that Vichy will follow it obediently either. There is no need to thank me for something like that." (Hifumi)

"Even if there are no results, I will gladly accept the situation just like that. Because of that, um …" (Origa)

With a deep red face Origa tried to convey something while being fidgety but she wasn't quite able to put it in words.

Seeing her like that, although it is appropriate for a girl of her age, for some reason she ends up wearing me out recently, Hifumi didn't consider his own gender in the slightest at all.

"You better not continue saying anything yet regarding the previous matter." (Hifumi)

"Eh?" (Origa)

"Even I am a man. I am happy about your feelings." (Hifumi)

Hifumi urged Origa to the couch in the reception and also sat in front of her himself.

“But, I bought you, who was a slave, as a slave. I couldn’t accomplish your vengeance properly either. Maa, I guess for Kasha this much was fine already. Even though I won’t say that I am close to fulfilling your revenge, isn’t this like the often seen part of imprinting something?” (Hifumi)

“Th-There is no such thing!” (Origa)

Origa, thinking that her feelings were denied, started to spill tears.

“Calm down. As I haven’t really settled down in this world yet, you can say that I didn’t think about wanting to have a relationship like that. It is for my own convenience. Sorry.” (Hifumi)

Seeing the figure of the apologizing Hifumi, Origa quickly subdued her feelings.

“S-Such a degree of apology towards me, Hifumi-sama, please stop it!” (Origa)

“I don’t dislike you. But, in the current situation I don’t plan to go any further than that. That’s right … once the case with Vichy has been settled, I will make time for us to talk at ease. However, only if Origa’s feelings haven’t changed at that time.” (Hifumi)

Even though Hifumi’s way of talking showed signs of jesting, Origa took it seriously.

“I understand. As my feelings won’t change, I will prove it to you that I am suitable woman to stand at Hifumi-sama’s side. Therefore, could you please watch me?” (Origa)

“… Understood” (Hifumi)

Was Hifumi’s reply sufficient for her for the time being? Regaining her smile, Origa bowed and left the room as she had to return to her work.

Hifumi, who was left behind, unsheathed his katana and checked the sword blade.

He saw that there was no nick in the blade. This had become his daily routine.

< Lover, Marriage, huh? Although I didn’t think about these things over there, now that I have become a noble, I wonder if somewhere there is an ojou-san approaching to snuggle up to me like the impressions I got from reading in books? As it is an often heard story, I wonder whether my own character will get as amicable to marry Origa or some other partner? Will I be able to cease killing people? > (Hifumi)

Other than killing or being killed, me ending up changing in such way, that is scary.

When I arrived in this world, I thought that I would be afraid for the first time.

I certainly never expected my first dread would be about relations with women , Hifumi sneering at himself in mockery.

Currently Hifumi didn’t possess anything of importance to him.

Be it the nation or the city, he was able to abandon them at any time. Sacrificing the populace in those circumstances as well, depending on the situation he wouldn’t have any qualm to do so.

Also separating from Kasha, he only thought that the usable fellows decreased by one without having any sentimental feelings.

Pajou and Sabnak as well, he intended to kill them if they asked unnecessary questions or became his enemies

even if they were close to him.

< I wonder if there is a fellow who wants to become the bride of such a guy? … > (Hifumi)

Or, I wonder, if becoming the wife is impossible, to become a cherished partner?

Bearing a child if possible …

“Stop, let’s just stop. It will only cause me to feel depressed.” (Hifumi)

As it was inevitable for him to worry about various things without making a decision either, he continued to immerse himself in his work.

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Apparently it wasn’t only Thorn who worked early but it was something that could be said for the entire dwarven race.

The dwarf slaves Hifumi had bought from Ular did their assigned work energetically from the first day after arriving in Fokalore.

As the exclusive development team of the territory, the leader of the dwarf slaves, Pruflas *(T/N: >> Purufurasu <<)*, separated 10 dwarves in several groups and had them work hard on the manufacturing.

As 15 dwarves were purchased, the remainder was working at the construction of the city currently.

The manufacturing area was an extensive workshop which was bought to be utilized.

Seeing the figure of Hifumi arriving, Pruflas ran up to him.

“Oo, feudal lord-sama?” (Pruflas)

“It seems the work is making progress.” (Hifumi)

Despite it only being one day since the work had started, there were already several products lined up at the side of the workshop.

“No, not at all. Since accepting the assignment of such enjoyable work, we are doing our best. After becoming slaves, though we wondered whether we would work in the mines until death, we can now produce things that we haven’t seen until now either like this and that. We all do this in order to thank the feudal lord. Now, please confirm whether we were able to follow your instructions adequately!” (Prulflas)

Guided by Prulflas, he checked the products in turns.

Producing according to Hifumi’s instructions, there were ballistas and weapons resembling large bow-guns. In order for those being able to shoot simple wood lances were produced instead of arrows.

So that huge quantities could be produced in a short time, rather than making arrows, the lances were quickly made by simply shaving the wood.

Furthermore there were rail cars in proportion of the size of a single standard-sized auto-mobile.

Although it was troublesome to explain the constructions, he judged it to be the maximum priority of his instructions to increase the means of transportation as it was indispensable to invigorate the industry.

The mechanism to move the upper and lower ends of the handle was simple. There was also a single rod installed to

control the brakes.

“Although I can understand the weapons, what do you want to do with this wagon called “rail car”? Certainly, as it is easy to move it with two people even if it has to carry heavy load, according to the blueprints it doesn’t provide a function to make a curve.” (Pruflas)

“I will draw up an exclusive rail. To say it accurately, we will lay out two poles side-by-side and place it on top of them. It will make the curves according to the curving of those poles.” (Hifumi)

“I see” (Prulflas)

“Haven’t you finished the movement test? Since I will dispatch some personnel as support, please construct two rails around the whole city.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi handed over a drawing of the whole city. It showed the traced lines of the drawn parts of the roads.

“Are there two of them?” (Pruflas)

“It’s convenient to have one going around in reverse. It will be a popular way of cheap travelling. It will stimulate the movement of people and goods in the whole city.” (Hifumi)

“How unexpected, to consider the population of the city.” (Pruflas)

At the exaggerated agreement of Pruflas, Hifumi laughed refreshingly.

“It is different. After this, I will have you make further rails having segments diverging away from this city to other places. In the direction of the national border.” (Hifumi)

“Not in the direction of the royal capital?” (Pruflas)

“Obviously not. Won’t these be used in order to quickly transport materials for the war? Goods and people as well. That alone is already advantageous for swiftly preparing.” (Hifumi)

The young feudal lord talked about dangerous things while smiling brightly. Prulflas had his breath taken away.

<This is the rumored hero “Knight of the Slender Sword”?> (Pruflas)

As for Prulflas, rather than a hero he felt something even more dreadful.

But, thinking back on his own position, there was nothing for him to do but displaying his skill here. He acted as if he didn’t hear Hifumi’s indications and renewed his attitude.

While he had a hunch that this city would become a battlefield someday.

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Chapter 32 – Message In A Bottle

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Debold, the second son of the Müntzer marquis family, brought ten guards and ten chamberlains with him as he left the royal capital. It all looked like a parade-like spectacle, with leaflets prepared for him rolling around. That was something Hifumi clearly saw when he returned to the royal capital with Alyssa.
On the scattered leaflets, “According to princess Imeraria’s wish, for the sake of the peace and harmony of the nation, Debold Müntzer has become the peace envoy”, could be read.
Despite it being the royal capital, the literacy rate was low. So even though some people picked up the leaflets, the extent of those who could read them was practically non-existent. Part of the crowd, consisting of drunkards and carefree people, were cheering loudly. But the huge majority were coldly appraising the flamboyant noble.
Like the people below, on the castle’s balcony, Imeraria saw them off with a cold gaze.
“Imeraria, did you need me?”
The one who called out to her was the Third Knight Unit’s Pajou.
“Oh, it’s Pajou.”
Turning around and seeing Pajou’s face, Imeraria relaxed a little.
“With this, I too, for the government’s sake, have sacrificed someone else, haven’t I?” Imeraria spoke but then mocked herself.
[No, the first victim should be he who is hailed as a hero]
“Debold was aiming for you, Imeraria. In my humble opinion, shouldn’t this be viewed as self-defense? Besides, the one who suggested this was me, so let me be the one to shoulder the sin of sacrificing that man.”
“… I’m sincerely happy over having your loyalty. Well then, in order for that plan to not come to naught, we can’t do anything but advance, can we?”
Following Imeraria, Pajou left the balcony and the two entered Imeraria’s office. Pajou was tormented with a sense of regret. Not because of the plan with sacrificing someone, but mainly due to what she had previously told Imeraria.

Earlier, after having separated from Hifumi, Kasha and Sabnak joined Pajou, who had already returned to the royal capital. In order to quickly report to Imeraria, the three briskly cleaned themselves off and arrived at the castle gates. After Kasha managed to get permission to enter, they were all rewarded with some gold by Imeraria in recognition of their services.
As they had previously received remuneration from Hifumi as well, Kasha did show some restraint in the beginning, but she was eventually forced to accept the gold as funds to start her life anew.
While Imeraria, on the other hand, was thinking that if they could use some money to win over someone having been close to Hifumi, it would be a cheap price to pay in the long run.
After all, if Hifumi kept going like this, continuing the war and building up strength, who knows when he would have a full-blown confrontation with Orsongrande. Fearing that, Imeraria wanted to hear Pajou’s opinion, having seen Hifumi’s manner of fighting close up. As the report concluded and Sabnak and Kasha stepped back, Pajou began a long follow-up session with Imeraria.
“At first I didn’t think Hifumi would be able to accomplish numerous amounts of military achievements as he has now. This, of course, is a matter of my predictions being too naive since we knew that only his individual military prowess was strong. But him having experienced countless battles, it seems that we still underestimated his absurdness.”
“Imeraria. I can say that I’m of the same opinion. The prime minister would also agree with us on this conclusion. No one could have expected that his love for battle would enable him to brilliantly take control of the enemies territory

with such ease."
While someone may be strong individually, it doesn't mean he will survive on the battlefield. And as far as the two of them, having undergone training for nobility and knights respectively, in terms of strategy and tactics, Hifumi's an expert. Besides using methods never seen before, he also had the lowest amount of possible casualties… those were all completely unexpected accomplishments.
News of Hifumi's activities had been brought to the royal capital by merchants coming from Vichy, and had already become the topic of conversation within the capital. Everywhere you went you could hear how the "Knight of the Slender Sword", with barely any casualties or losses, had overwhelmed Vichy. It was just as it was in one of those heroic tales.
It was slightly exaggerated, but mostly true. Something that should've been good news for Orsongrande was conversely quite unpleasant. Even if the Royal castle didn't want Hifumi's popularity to rise, there wasn't much they could do about it.
If it continued like this, Hifumi may take away all the popularity Imeraria was having, as well as the sense of respect towards the royal castle, for himself.
"He really is a hero, but above that, he's a lunatic. He's nurturing both cities and the people within them for the sake of fighting, and creating environments in which he can kill others."
Using intentionally strong words, Pajou told Imeraria.
She didn't intend to say that but it was a necessary step for the formation of her plan. For only under the leadership of the princess could her plan be carried out.
"If you'd forgive me, I have a plan I'd like to present to you."
"Go ahead, let me hear about it."
The plan Pajou had thought about was, simply put, 'to make it seem like Imeraria was the one who ended the final war'. That Arosel, while under Orsongrandes control, was essentially an unnecessary territory and would be difficult to govern.
First of all, they'd use Debold as a messenger to provoke Vichy into dispatching troops to take back their previous territory. While they're fighting Hifumi in territories such as Fokalore, which he had just recently been bestowed, or Arosel which has recently become occupied, Imeraria would unconditionally surrender Vichy's former territories with an absolute concession. Lastly, they'd secretly make an agreement to cease hostilities. Pajou planned to achieve these plans all in one go.
"Debold will probably be killed. And the majority of the soldiers leaving for Arosel and the like will die as well. But with this, Hifumi's military gains will reach its limit. And we'll then publicize that you were the one who brought back the peace."
"Vichy's soldiers should be able to hold Hifumi back, shouldn't they?"
First of all, the initial unrest would be over there. And as a result of Vichy taking up arms, they should be able to tear into Hifumi and afflict some damage.
"That being the case, we need to have Vichy counterattacking with a lot of soldiers. It's necessary to provoke them to the extent they believe that unless they attack with all their power, they'll have no option but to face ruin. For that purpose, we have the peace envoy bringing a provoking letter."
"…Please give it some thought."
Having returned for the day, Imeraria called Debold to her office the next day.
Finally, his own turn has come. Catching a glance of Debold triumphantly striding over towards Imeraria, Pajou saw him off with a mix of remorse and resolve. It's for the sake of the country!

Understandably, Vichy's central council received the letter Hifumi sent first.
"Hand over Beirevra, huh?"
Scanning over the letter presented by their spy, the elderly council member let out a sigh.
Right now he was the only member in the room. All the other members were spending their time dealing with their own cities. He was called Minoson, a city representative of the city located furthest away from Orsongrande, so after having gathered an assuring amount of soldiers, he stopped.
The other council members had plans to gather soldiers soon as well but were generally behind schedule. Their

territories were whittled away, making it clear that just defending the city would prove hard. The cities near the national border were frantically thinking up any means of defending their cities.
If Minoson's city was attacked, it meant that Vichy would've already collapsed at that point in time. Of course, he wouldn't not make any great effort just because of that. War is unchanging. For the sake of a new era, any powerful people on the losing side would have to be sacrificed. That's just the way it is.
"Even so, this is troublesome."
The problem was the letter lying in front of him.
Concerning giving up the spy called Beirevra, Minoson was well aware of what had happened over by Arosel. If giving him over would end all this, it would've been a good option.
But currently, Beirevra's whereabouts were unknown.
He was summoned before the council before this letter's arrival, where he briefed them on the news from Arosel. He was a man past thirty, with a small stature, and facial features giving him a cunning expression.
With the threat of Hifumi approaching Vichy, and himself being summoned, perhaps he suspected something. The second time he was summoned, he never appeared. Other spies looked for him but found nothing.
It's quite unlikely he went towards Orsongrande or the Beast's territory. It would seem natural if he were to use one of the intermediaries he got close to in dealing with the distribution of the magical tools to cross over to Horant. But an inquiry was made, and Horant responded with a formal letter that there were no records of him crossing the border. Minoson didn't believe them at all though.
However, they didn't strongly pursue Horant for that.
After all, if Vichy takes an aggressive stance against Orsongrande, Horant making a display of gathering soldiers it would apply some pressure. A proposal would then have been made so that depending on the situation, both Horant and Vichy would attack, forcing Orsongrande to defend on two fronts at once.
They were allies, although it wasn't an alliance without obstacles. It'd be hard if it was only Vichy, but granted that Horant were to join them, they could turn the tables on Orsongrande.
"Doing that, they will have to wrack their brains on the spot for a countermeasure."
The council members gathered within two hours. They didn't really have any opposing opinions, so Minoson's plan was approved.
Currently, in accordance with the letter, there are no other alternatives than Vichy unconditionally becoming a vassal state of Orsongrande, or being completely absorbed. For the moment, Vichy won't respond to the demands or talks of reconciliations. They will gather the troops from all their cities and recapture some city-states. After an assured victory, they'd enter negotiations with Orsongrande.
They planned to go all out. As soon as they finished rallying their forces, they would march towards Rhone en masse.

By the time Debold and the delegation representing Orsongrande entered Fokalore, Hifumi had just instructed the dwarfs to construct a protective wall at the city entrance.
When a strange gaudy carriage, followed by around 20 people became visible, the guards and general populace got ready to welcome the incoming noble. Hifumi, however, ignored them and continued talking with the dwarfs.
"So, make some diamond shaped holes in the wall, like this."
"Is it really okay, making a hole in the wall ?"
"With this interval, you can use bows or javelin-throwing machines to attack. If the holes are too big, they're useless, so we want them to be just barely big enough to aim through them."
"Haha, I see."
While the young dwarf was admiring Hifumi's knowledge, Debold and company entered the city.
Nevertheless, the soldiers under Hifumi's leadership were thorough. Even if the traveler came from within the country, and even if they were an aristocrat, they were to be completely checked.
"How rude! I'm the Müntzer marquis family's amazing Debold, a peace envoy appointed by her highness princess Imeraria! You lowly soldier bastards have no reason to do an inspection!"
Stopping the carriage, the soldiers were interfered with by the vain Debold, as he shouted at them with an ugly face.
They could freely pass all other cities until Fokalore, where they were subjected to a normal inspection, which

Debold was dissatisfied with.
Hearing the words ‘Peace envoy’, Hifumi approached the raging Debold.
“Shut up.”
“Huh, you’re that disrespectful upstart. Heh, if you’re the leader, no wonder your subordinates also behave like this.”
With a broad grin appearing on his face, he tried to make a fool out of Hifumi. However, Hifumi’s facial expression didn’t change.
“This is my city. I’m the law. We don’t know what guys like you are bringing in, so we need to do a thorough search.”
“What kind of absurd thing is that. It’s for bastards like you of low birth. This doesn’t concern me since I am of the Marquises lineage. Advance.”
As he ordered the coachman to continue, before he noticed, a drawn blade was gleaming in front of his eyes.
Having drawn closer in an instant, Hifumi’s abruptly drawn katana made Debold tremble. His fear filled eyes reflected on the blade.
“Hiii… You bastard, what are you…”
“I said so, didn’t I? Here, I’m the law. If you don’t abide by the rules, I’ll dispose of you as a criminal.”
Debold’s face flushed. In the end, he didn’t resist Hifumi’s pressuring and trembled in disgrace. He gave a sidelong stare at the soldier who checked the roof rack’s contents on Hifumi’s orders. Without hiding his fury, Debold spoke in a trembling voice.
“You bastard. With what you’ve just done to me, I hope you’re prepared… On her highness princess Imeraria’s imperial command, I’m an envoy on my way to Vichy’s central government.”
Hifumi didn’t answer. He was given a small box with a seal on it from the soldier who found it. After carefully opening it, he found a pure white paper inside. This kind of paper was very rare in this world. It was folded and sealed with beeswax.
“That’s her highness the princess’ handwritten letter! It’s not something bastards like you are allowed to touch!”
Ignoring the screaming Debold, Hifumi took the letter in his hand and held it up against the sun.
“…I see.”
The letter, sealed just as before, was quickly returned to its original place by the soldier.
“That’s enough, go along.”
“Remember this, you low-life. After I’ve fulfilled my mission, I’ll make you regret having that attitude.”
“Is that so? Well, do your best.”
Completely without interest, Hifumi returned to his meeting. All the while Debold glared at him until he was out of sight from the carriage.
“Hifumi, is that really okay?”
Origa ran over to Hifumi from someplace. A shuriken in her hand, as if she was going to throw it somewhere.
“He’s just a pathetic clown. No need to take him seriously. We probably won’t even meet him again. Leaving that aside, the national border by Rhone will soon become a battlefield again. Rearrange the troops and ready them to leave.”
“You got information that Vichy is going to attack?”
“I guess so. But it seems we still have time to spare. So let’s carefully prepare a welcome party for them. Alright, looks like we’ll be busy again.”
Of course. they’d have to use the various goods the dwarfs had made. Moving towards the Dwarfs workplace, one idea after another on how to fight against Vichy gushed forth into Hifumi’s head.
The premonitions Hifumi had about the war would be slightly betrayed by reality, just two weeks after this day.

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Chapter 33 – Overjoyed

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Returning to the capital and also after completing Imeria's proposal, there was a huge pile of work waiting for Pajou without giving her the chance to take a day off.
Because it was necessary to reconcile the Third Knight Unit with the other Knight Units, many reports had to be submitted to the management department of the royal castle.
The Third Knight Unit's office was next to the royal castle.
It was the place where Hifumi had come previously to enjoy teatime with Pajou and where the dead Gothras had picked a fight with Hifumi.
Currently, besides Sabnak and Midas, Pajou had assembled the unit members who more or less knew about Hifumi.

"I think that it is a dangerous gamble. At least Vichy hasn't managed to gather 10.000 to 20.000 soldiers. If they assemble such an amount, it will be unknown whether that man would be able to stop them." (Midas)

Midas listened to the Imeria's adopted plan following Pajou's suggestion. After folding his arms and brooding over it for a short while, he clearly stated that it would be dangerous.

"Although I understand your anxiety, Midas-senpai, I believe it is a good plan. Even if the military of Fokalore did such a thing like recruiting from the citizens, they won't surpass 200 either way. No matter how powerful the individual may be, it is pointless with the difference in numbers. Besides, because it isn't wrong to say that the war was established by Vichy to begin with, it can be said that the part of not particularly antagonizing Hifumi-san is good." (Sabnak)

Sabnak rebutted Midas' opinion.
Going by what was talked about Hifumi, even though the area Hifumi had invaded became unofficially known as "New Territory", it was decided to call it like that until the current war was settled. As consequence of fulfilling the inhabitants dream of a full day of holiday, they had now become completely full of spirit.
With the pros and cons of the two's opinions only more opinions rose up, not to mention that all of them weren't able to agree on one common point either. *Since the plan had been accepted by Imeria in the end, in addition to us having to abide to our duty, it could be said that due to our work we have to watch over the state of affairs.*

"Rather, I guess no matter the various things said here in relation to the situation, since the plan has already started it's now too late anyway." (Sabnak)

"That's not quite so. Besides, we have gathered here to discuss about the work from here on." (Pajou)

"From here on?" (Midas)

Seeing that they understood the general state of affairs, Pajou began to talk about the purpose of this gathering.

"Although this a not yet fixed prediction, I think that the stage of the peace talks between Imeria-sama and the Vichy representative will likely become Fokalore or Arosel." (Pajou)

The knight unit's members mostly understood Pajou's prediction.

By no means would either side travel as far as to be close to the other side's capital. Apart from talking about what they will do about the one in the superior situation, it was custom for the peace talks to be held at a place on the winners' side close to the border.
In the current situation, the only difference would be whether it was the new border or the old border. Everyone could agree that it could become either one depending on the postwar circumstances.

"This time the Knight Unit planned to accompany as guards for the peace talks isn't the First Knight Unit, but us, the Third Knight Unit." (Pajou)

"Us? Not the First or Second?"

"Yes. The First Knight Unit feels like challenging Hifumi. We don't want to unnecessarily provoke him. Furthermore they can't leave from guarding the royal castle which harbors His Highness the prince… something like that will likely put forth as excuse. The Second Knight Unit has the duty of defending the capital. Since there are also some people among the populace using the cover of guarding such conference to incite something, I think the realm would be weakened if they left." (Pajou)

All members had the atmosphere of having understood it and were in an uproar over the excitement of preparing such a big stage.
Even though they were all proud of protecting the royal capital and castle from the shadows, there were only few chances to openly partake in such a big job. Thus it couldn't be helped that they felt enthusiastic about the chance to display their competency either.
But, due to the Pajou's words following afterwards, everyone's excitement instantly subsided.

"Because royalty will join the conference held by the border, it has been decided that a war potential of several thousands will be taken along, as precaution so to say. And, depending on the circumstances… Hifumi-san will be subjugated." (Pajou)

"Na… what kind of circumstances?"

"Of course you are not to tell a word about this to anyone except those gathered in this place. Those are the plans of Imeria-sama. If he is in a situation of having fallen or a critical condition due to being injured after having successfully attacked Vichy, we are to pretend leading military forces from our side as reinforcements and attack him from the rear." (Pajou)

In the room that ended up sinking into silence, Pajou tasted some black tea to moisten her mouth.

"Only those members present here will march to that area. After everything is finished, it will be announced that he committed suicide due to being driven into a corner." (Pajou)

"D-Don't say such absurd things. There is no way that an amount of several people will be able to kill him." (Midas)

Only Midas had seen his appearance as he simply turned the tables on 10 assassins. Even in his imagination he couldn't see himself standing up to that in front of his eyes.

"Of course, if he isn't in a condition to that degree, since the conference is held for the sake of peace according to the ostensible reason, it will come to a close with the recognition of right to own the territory close to the national border for Hifumi-san. But if the chance presents itself to somehow deal with him as intended by Imeria-sama's plan, I will also support it." (Pajou)

Although having also been helped during crisis, having participated in joint operations for several days and being nobles of the same country, Imeria and Pajou, rather than seeing him as companion, they regarded Hifumi as dangerous.

“Such a…” (Sabnak)

“… If that’s Imeria-sama’s wish, then I will obey to it. As for myself, I can only pray that the result will be him settling down in the Viscount territory.” (Midas)

Sabnak became speechless due to his considerable feeling of fascination towards Hifumi. Whereas Midas chose to indifferently accept matters.

“But, how will you know in what kind of situation he is? We will end up being sensed before we can approach a visible distance, don’t you agree?” (Midas)

“As for that, there is a person I thought of asking for cooperation. If it’s her, I don’t expect any problems for her being close to Hifumi-san.” (Pajou)

“That is…” (Sabnak)

As if he suddenly understood who that person was, Sabnak looked at Pajou with eyes of disbelief.

“Because I am quite aware of something like this being called an act going against humanity, don’t look at me with such eyes. But, there was no other plan I could think of either.” (Pajou)

No one was able to agree or disagree with Pajou in this situation. The meeting of the Third Knight Unit ended.

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After Hifumi and the troops arrived at the new border close to Rhone, ten days had passed.
During that time large parts of the city Rhone had been restructured leaving only the lodging for the soldiers and the fortress at the newly established border.
With the inhabitants annihilated and since the buildings were almost completely undamaged, there were heaps of materials to construct something. As several dwarves were brought along and with the engineering soldiers, there were plenty of hands available.
There was no way that he wouldn’t make use of that. Disregarding the border guards dispatched by the capital with a look of suspicion, Hifumi instructed to make changes all over.
No matter how many houses they dismantled, the dwarves and soldiers continued to produce one thing after the other every day even though they didn’t quite understand the unclear explanations.
This daily life came to an end on the eleventh day.
Worn-out and sullied Debold came to take refuge in Rhone making sure to cling to his horse.
As he was sheltered by the border guard, immediately a report came in to the person with the highest rank in town, Hifumi.

“Ou, you made it back, huh?” (Hifumi)

Was my prediction off at the time I saw him off? While laughing he clapped the shoulders of the soldier who came to report.

“If I remember correctly, wasn’t Debold dispatched to prepare the peace talks?”

“Peace? As the central committee of Vichy has no attachment to their fragmented country either, it may be possible to advance the peace talks.” (Hifumi)

At the time he held up the the handwritten letter Debold possessed against the sun, Hifumi managed to steal a peek at a part of the contents. He understood that the contents in this situation could be still judged as lukewarm even though one might call them a provocation towards Vichy.

“If you thought of that letter being received as means to get along with, I guess that person would have their aspirations being destroyed now.” (Hifumi)

Accompanied by Origa, who wore a face full of questions, Hifumi conveyed to Alyssa to start deploying the soldiers for a quasi-war.
The soldier who came to report departed the room at a quick pace.

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In a building, which was formerly a private house being confiscated to be utilized as office, Debold received medical treatment.
Although one might say that, other than him being fatigued there was no injury standing out. Given that he raised hell over the degree of a trifling scratch, a fake medical treatment was done to the extent of simply coiling bandages.
Debold, whose arms were coiled in bandages, rested on top of a bed. He flared up as soon as he saw the face of Hifumi entering the room.

“I-It’s your fault! Because of you I had to suffer like that!” (Debold)

Returning Debold to the bed after having grabbed him and kicking him in the belly, Hifumi said in a calm voice.

“Concisely report from the start to the end. Since we have to deal with the situation on this side as well. What happened in Vichy? What about the guards that accompanied you?” (Hifumi)

“Guu~” (Debold)

Relucantly Debold began to talk. Apparently the guards had been completely annihilated.
Debold boldly entered the city Epinaru, where the central committee of Vichy assembled, as messenger. The very same day he obtained the permission to meet with the committee. The next day he was able to talk with each and every member of the committee.
He passed the handwritten letter to a member of the committee. During the time while the committee members read it, he talked about what a deeply benevolent person Princess Imeria of Orsongrande was making it inevitable for him to obey as loyal retainer bearing such adoration for her. Rudely throwing back the handwritten letter, they were attacked by the soldiers in the assembly hall, he said.

“The committee members of Vichy blamed you, bastard, for coming to this town and slaughtering everyone. No matter whether it was you, son of a bitch, who attacked this town or not, the war will continue as long as Orsongrande doesn’t execute you! You trampled on the kindness of Her Highness… ga?!” (Debold)

Hifumi grabbed the head of Debold, who continued running his mouth in wild agitation, and pressed it against the wall.

“It is particularly convenient for them to lay the blame on me for destroying this town. I guess all of the guards have been killed. What happened to the chamberlains?” (Hifumi)

“I-I don’t know… They remained waiting at the inn because I went to meet the committee… Leaving that aside, r-release me!” (Debold)

As he tried to act violently by struggling, Hifumi’s thumb and little finger dug into the temple of the forehead making a grinding sound. Debold didn’t have any strength left due to the pain.
During that time, Hifumi pulled out the document protruding from Debold’s breast pocket.
It was the handwritten letter which was crumpled before being thrown back.
Quickly opening it with one hand and checking it, it contained Imeria’s signature without a doubt. Looking through the content it matched with what he had seen when he held it against the sun.

“This may have usable value from now on. I will keep it.” (Hifumi)

“Bastard, this was entrusted to me by Her Highness… ah… aaahhh!” (Debold)

“Your role has come to an end. Since I will play with the guys you lured in from Vichy from now on, an actor who has finished his turn has to promptly leave the stage.” (Hifumi)

While saying this, Hifumi steadily raised the strength he put into his hand. His fingers already broke the temple and sank in.

“Never! … St-Stop it, don’t, please sto… gu gi” (Debold)

Releasing a wet sound of *gushu* Debold sank into eternal silence.

“Origa. The enemy will be here soon. Go to Alyssa’s place and tell her to begin the military operations and to take their stations.” (Hifumi)

“Roger.” (Origa)

Origa, who watched Debold’s manner of death calmly, left the room quickly.
At the time Hifumi turned his back on the room and left, the soldiers of the border security had already been instructed by Hifumi’s soldiers to take refuge in the fortress.

“Well then, Imeria. It appears that during the time I was in Vichy, Lady Luck has visited that fool. Did my calculations go amiss? Or did you foresee until here? At least, the handwritten letter being here must have been unexpected, I guess.” (Hifumi)

While storing the handwritten letter in his breast pocket, Hifumi laughed.

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The Vichy soldiers chasing after Debold reached a number of 300.
Knowing the numerical figures of Hifumi’s private army being around 100 soldiers, as they had received the intelligence from a spy, the objective was to move the maximum amount of military forces available to immediately move out.
The troops organised and assembled from the committee member’s private armies, although they were lacking leadership, the amount of them was quite excessive for chasing a single enemy.

“Soon we will be at the town Rhone.”

To the adjutant’s words, the man leading the troops as commanding officer silently nodded.
While advancing on horse, this man planned to use this opportunity to take back Rhone.
Even though his order was to chase and arrest the fleeing messenger from Orsongrande, if it happens that his prey takes refuge in Rhone, it was also possible to give the excuse that there was no other way but to retake it.
For the sake of this excuse, he also kept the speed of the pursuit low, which was the reason why Debold was able to return to Rhone alive.

“Though the town has come into view, there don’t seem to be any guards on watch…”

“It’s the place they insist on being their national border. I guess they will come out from the other side of that gate. Everyone, draw your swords in preparation for combat! We will slaughter the enemies coming out of the gate in one go!”

While listening to the shouts of the soldiers agreeing to his instructions, his expectations got big as he imagined the possibility of him becoming the feudal lord of some city-state if he were to successfully recapture Rhone here.

Those expectations pushed the man's back .
The 300 soldiers formed a line and the first of the vanguard rushed into Rhone.
When about half of them started running, just as the commanding officer decided to advance on his horse, screams began to arise from the leading group.

"What is it!"

A messenger ran up from the front. Because of a rope being stretched across the pathway, several soldiers were tripped up and tread on by those following them resulting in casualties.

"What foolishness! Don't they watch what's below their feet! Tell them to drop the speed of invasion!"

While raising his voice in anger, the commanding officer thought that it was good that he stayed behind the vanguard.
Falling from the horse to get buried beneath the horse's feet, letting alone the disgrace, he would receive serious injuries and in worst case it wouldn't be unlikely to be killed.
Having the wind taken out of their sails, as they slowly advanced into the city with a large number of people, the Vichy soldiers were dumbfounded when they saw the state of the town.
Even the commanding officer, who was late in entering, was overcome with surprise seeing the strange scene in front of him.
Continuing straight on the main street from the town's gate, there should have been many flourishing stores when the town was filled with people.
As there wasn't a single person there, he understood that this place was deserted.
However, the entrances of all buildings were closed with nailed boards. Even the passages between the buildings were blocked with lumber up to the height of the waist.
It was almost as if telling them that there was only one road in front of them to take.
And, far down the road a single man in unusual clothing was standing about 500 meters ahead of the vanguard.
The man held a thin weapon you could consider to be a sword in his right hand. The man, standing in a relatively relaxed posture, slowly beckoned them.

"Gentlemen of the pursuit party, it's nice of you to arrive here. It is unnecessary for you to introduce yourselves. Hurry up and come. Since you will be killed anyway." (Hifumi)

Merely a single man recklessly provoking 300 soldiers, the commanding officer gave the order to advance as he laughed scornfully.

"There is only a single great utter fool! Kill him immediately and use it as chance for our country to counterattack! Go!"

The leading group set up their swords and broke into a run.

This was the beginning of the second massacre carried out at the town of Rhone.

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Chapter 34 – Highway Star

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Translated by a 98% dead Clown

Stoic stood Hifumi, awaiting the Vichy soldiers in his Hakama and Dougi.
The byroads were blocked off, but he stood on the main—a road eight meters in width where a group could easily surround a man.
Yet Hifumi stood in the middle of it.
He expressed no caution; his eyes simply reflected the scene before him.
And he felt happiness.
Behold how many enemies have come! How many he could slay! This scene, this happiness, surely he could never have felt it were he still in Japan.
As the smile rose on his face, a katana rose in his hands; and with speed of lightning striking from the heavens, with the gentleness of a leaf carried by the wind, the katana was swung down.
「・・・Huh?」
The enthusiastic vanguard blinked, unsure of what had happened, but by the time he blinked again he had already drowned in blood. For his face had split open.
Again and again the sound of wind being cut was followed by shrieks.
A step into his range, and the katana tip would reap your life.
Cut the throat.
Pierce the eye.
Slice open an artery where the armor was weak.
Not once did the katana strike bone or armor.
As mechanically as if doing work, as beautifully as if an artist, he repeatedly carved their bodies from every angle.
「Surround him! Encircle and slay him!」
Their captain barked out orders, and as if snapping out of a trance, the soldiers attacked Hifumi from both sides and the rear.
And yet no one managed to wound him.
A sword only cut air around him; a mace merely struck earth.
「How can he evade it?!」
「Pierce the beast, damn it!」
「I don't want to die…!」
「T-the blood is not stopping…」
Hifumi was quite surrounded: some desperately rushing to be killed, others already a corpse, and yet others soon to become a corpse.
The road was dyed red: and to a friend it may even have looked beautiful.

「Fire the arrows」
「Huh?」
「I'm telling you to shoot that monster!」
The captain angrily responded to his adjutant, who could not comprehend such a bizarre order.

「But, we will hit our own if we fire now」
「I don't care. If we don't bring it down, even more will die」
「…Understood」

Curtly replying, the Adjutant offered a prayer and ordered the bowmen to fire.
The arrows, much to the pride of their bowmen, flew tightly together.
Without waiting for the result, the captain began issuing orders to the remaining soldiers.
They were to dismantle the structures blocking the roads and attack the enemy from behind.
He had thus sent a hundred men on this quest.
「No matter how strong he may be, no one can fight this many men」
Ordering the another volley of arrows, the captain was sure of his victory.

A rain of arrows entered Hifumi's view.
「Too few. They won't hit」
Taking but a single step away, arrows landed around Hifumi.
A few soldiers around him were hit, and wallowed in agony.
Those who could still move he disposed of; those who were fatally injured he ignored.
He decapitated those who were hit in the shoulder, and then noticed that the enemy's commander was ordering his men to clear the roads.
「So they had finally begun」
And after briefly cutting down a few more Vichy soldiers, Hifumi confirmed that a hundred men had gone off to clear the roads and smiled.
「So the slaughter finally beings? Come, be a man!」
A flash.
Seeing Hifumi decapitate five more men, even the trained soldiers stopped motionless.
Though he was drenched in their blood, he nonetheless pulled out a paper to wipe the blood from his katana, and, after doing so, sheathed it.
「Guess I should clean up a bit」
Darkness spread from Hifumi's shadow and swallowed the earth around him. Hifumi use his darkness magic to dispose of the corposes.
Vichy soldiers were terrified, although it had no effect on them—you can't store away a living thing.
With Hifumi in the center of a sea of darkness, the myriad corpses sunk and disappeared.
As if the battle had never happened.
「Now then, I'm going to go get your captain's head. Do try to stop me please.」
At some point the katana on Hifumi's waist was replaced with a 130 cm long pole.
「It's my first time using this weapon. Surely you won't resent me for not killing you quickly?」
They would probably resent him no matter how he killed him; the few soldiers who remained now had their heads smashed in. As before, they just kept on dying.
But unlike before, Hifumi was slowly walking forward even as he continued to slay countless men.
「Come on, keep the line. Ready your blades… Oh?」
A second rain of arrows has come.
Hifumi twisted the end of the pole, and a chain dangled out from within it.
With all their men firing in unison, there far more arrows this time.
And while Hifumi was deflecting the arrows with the chain and approaching the Vichy captain, distant screams reached his ears.

Although the blockade was made of a durable material, if many people were to press on it, surely it would eventually fall.
The same occurred, and many soldiers started heading towards the main.
The first among them were the youngest, those unaccustomed to war.
And after a few steps the ground beneath their feet disappeared only to reveal iron and wooden pikes.

Unable to so much as scream their bodies were pierced, and those who fell on top of them rendered fatal their wounds.
Those who screamed were those who fell on top of the young.
This crafty trap was placed past every blockade, and the number of wounded and dead only increased.
Even if they were to take another route, they would only fall prey to another trap.
Surely the number of dead would only number in the dozens, but the objective was not to kill but to stop their advance.
The soldiers who stopped before the traps were welcomed by a volley of spears flying towards them.
The soldiers were close enough that the spears needed not arch in their path, and many were pierced as a result.
Hifumi's guard appeared from deep within the buildings, as they use the spear-thrower to slaughter Vichy men.
There were few such spear-throwers, so those empty handed followed with bows and arrows.
The roads were narrow, and Hifumi's guards were far; they could leisurely snipe away at Vichy soldiers. Even more lives were quickly extinguished.
As for the captain, with messengers coming at him to report of ever increasing casualties, and the sight of Hifumi approaching, caused him to lose any remaining composure.
Without waiting for an order, the adjutant commanded all remaining troops to attack the approaching monster. Yet he could not expect many to gather.
And wielding a bizarre staff with chains, a man continued to approach while creating more and more corpses behind him.
「At this rate…」
The adjutant wanted to command the forces to retreat but then he glanced over the captain.
Would this power-hungry man be able to approve of that decision? Withdrawing now would close the door on his career. But otherwise all would die. Should he withdraw troops even if it means being court-martialed? The adjutant hesitated.

The weapon Hifumi wielded, is a traditional Japanese martial arts weapon from the staff-family: the Chigiriki (Promise Tree). Normally it is made of wood, but it had to be made of metal so as to withstand Hifumi's strength.
With its length coming up to his chest, this weapon which is also sometimes called the Chigirki (Chest-cutting Tree), has a chain attached to the end of it and a weight attached to the chain. It is like a Japanese chain flail.
The weapon has its perks and demerits, and is rather hard to use; and although it's not Hifumi's specialty, the weapon does allow for a great variety of attacks if you were to mix in Jojutsu* while using it.
* A form of martial art using a cane staff.
For example, crushing somebody's throat and then stepping on their chest so as to stop their heart; or breaking their jaw, forcing them on their knees in tears, and smashing in their heads.
Leaving corpses even more deformed than when he was using a blade, Hifumi hastened his pace towards a gathering of soldiers.
This massacre has yet to end.

「Captain, we must retreat」
「A single man… Are you telling me we lost to a single man!?」
Scolding his man, the captain desperately asked anyone to kill Hifumi, but the adjutant only sighed.
And after taking a few steps away from the captain, the adjutant called out to nearby soldiers and made preparations to leave Rhone. Captain in his haste did not notice it; but Hifumi did.
The departure of thirty men created an opening.
The captain left understaffed and unprotected, Hifumi charged in
「W-wha.. th…?」
The captain never even had the chance to draw his blade. By the time he noticed he was abandoned, it was too late.
「Die」
With but a single word, Hifumi wrapped the chain around the captain's neck and brought him down from the horse.
Struggle the captain as he might, he could do naught until Hifumi's finger pierce through his eye.

When Hifumi withdrew his hand, the captain (corpse) looked rather amusing.
Seeing their captain killed, the soldiers completely lost their will to fight, and began edging back.
「Your general is dead」
Of course, they would abandon the corpse.
「If you want to run, now would be the time? Desperately run back to your masters and tell them what had happened here. That's if they believe you of course」
Fearing the smile on Hifumi's face, the Vichy soldiers scattered like baby spiders before a predator.
They abandoned their weapons and the wounded too.
Hifumi calmly wandered the field, disposing of any wounded, while his guard was busy burying the bodies.
Those who had recently joined his guard were throwing up with lifeless eyes, while those who had already worked with Hifumi meticulously continued their tasks.
Origa and Alyssa, after issuing the troops orders, rushed over to Hifumi.
After looking at his appearance, Hifumi's face had a bitter smile on it as he wondered how he'd wash all the gore off.
He continued to take deep breaths even as he put away the Chigiriki into his dark storage.
The blood-stained main road soon welcomed a bloody sunset.

With less than a hundred men, Hifumi's guards utterly crushed a force many times larger—in but three days such rumors reached the capital, and the bars were filled with songs of praise for the "Knight of the Slender Sword."
Having witnessed these revelries in the guild, Kasha, who came there to get her quest reward, wandered into the moon-lit street.
She left of her own free will; as an adventurer her life made an about turn and she was rather well off. She also sick of killing people, was satisfied with her life as a freewoman, dined in fancy and expensive restaurants, and even went out to buy herself a new weapon.
Even so, she occasionally missed Origa.
To her surprise, she rarely thought of Hifumi, but when she did, she would remember his face when he ordered a man to die for her revenge.
When she returned to her room, she turned on the magic tool Hifumi gave her.
Within the four-corners of her small inn room, she collapsed on the bed, feelings of loneliness overcoming her.
「It's not like I'm in love or anything…」
That line only increased her despair.
Perhaps she was mistaken. Perhaps she should have stayed with Hifumi and Origa. Or, perhaps she should have forced Origa to come with her, even if by force.
As many thoughts and regrets filled her mind, she heard someone knock on the door.
「…Who is it?」
She grabbed a sword and asked.
In response, she heard a familiar feminine voice.
「It's Pajo. There's something we need to discuss」
「? Why are you here?」
In response to being let in, Pajo flashed an elegant smile.
「It's not that hard to find where you live. I am a knight in charge of protecting this city, after all」
「My, my, how impressive. Now then, what do you need from me?」
As there were no chairs, they sat on the bed and spoke without looking each other in the eyes.
「There's a request for you coming from the Crown」
「The Crown? What could the Crown from a simple adventurer?」
Wouldn't it be better to make a request of the guild, she asked, but Pajo only smiled.
「This is something only you can do」
Without any reservation, Pajo made a single request of her.
「Could you monitor Hifumi-san for us?」
Kasha was silent, and merely blankly stared at Pajo. The smile on her face has long turned serious, and cold, gold eyes stared straight at Kasha.

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Chapter 35 – Celebrity

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After once again rearranging the defense at the national border, Hifumi withdrew to Fokalore. letting the soldiers rest while the spear throwers were repaired and improved.
According to Hifumi's prognosis, if Vichy was really raising an army, they'd need around a month before they arrive. Even just rallying the troops split up in order to protect all their cities would take a considerable amount of time, and since there isn't a clear head of the state, there will be disputes regarding who gets to be in command.
Hifumi thought about attacking Vichy while they were slowly assembling their army, but he was busy enough with governing Fokalore. A couple of city-states situated within Vichy, but close to Orsongrande, had shown up to show their allegiance to Hifumi, and it was necessary for him to deal with them.
"Even if they come here, we can't unconditionally accept them. We'll soon be continuing our war with Vichy, so any specific exchanges will have to wait until after that."
"Understood. I'll convey that to the messengers."
Origa was the one who interacted with the messengers.
Hifumi could've done it as well, but as there were many things to think about, Origa was temporarily given that role. They can decide what to do after the war is over.
"I don't have the ability to be a politician to begin with. I'm glad I decided to train those civil official slaves ahead of time. If I were to try and gather people now, there wouldn't be any time to sleep."
After seeing Origa off, he stretched out on the reception sofa.
"Hifumi."
Alyssa called out, having smoothly entered the slightly opened door.
Although it's really a breach of etiquette, there wasn't any need to hold back, as Hifumi was already aware of her presence. They had been conducting spy training for a while now though, in order to make her able to slip in and out soundlessly.
"I heard the metallic sound of the door, so you fail."
Since Hifumi's very strict when grading, Alyssa had yet to receive a passing grade.
"Th-that aside, you've got a visitor."
"Who?"
"Well… It's Kasha."
So she came. Without letting Alyssa see, Hifumi sneered.

"Ehh, the talk about your endeavors have reached the capital. How you repelled Vichy's army without any losses."
"Aah, I see."
After being let through to the reception, Kasha was sitting down, face to face with Hifumi, but the conversation wasn't continuing.
Within the heavy atmosphere, Hifumi was observing the quiet Kasha as if he could see through her.
"…… So?"
「 Well… Er… 」

As she became flustered, there was a knock on the door, and Origa entered.
“Alyssa told me there was a visitor…”
Discovering Kasha, Origa instinctively stopped, and she quickly lost the smile on her face.
“So you’re here. Take a seat.”
Hifumi deliberately didn’t mention in what seat, nor make any hand gestures.
As Origa unhesitatingly chose to sit down next to Hifumi, Kasha showed a hint of sadness.
“So, what’s your business, coming here?”
“W-well, you see… I’m quite limited working alone as an adventurer, and partnering up with someone else now feels a bit…”
“After receiving such a big favor and selfishly leaving, you think Hifumi will let you back again?”
“Uuu…”
Hifumi was listening to their exchange in silence. If it kept going as it currently was, it would just end with Origa one-sidedly throwing accusations at Kasha, who would end up being chased away. It’s about time to give her some timely help.
“Well, ‘accept those who comes to you, and don’t chase those who leave’, they say. I don’t really mind employing you again. We’re lacking manpower, after all.”
“Hifumi!”
Seeing Hifumi approve as if nothing had happened, Origa clung to him to protest, but Hifumi put his hand on hers to calm her down.
“Your workload has increased considerably. If it’s an acquaintance whose abilities you know, it should be easier to divide the workload, wouldn’t it? Besides, there’s also the next battle. I don’t want to work you too hard.”
“Hifumi…”
With Hifumi showing concern for her, as well as holding her hand, Origa blushed.
What an easy to understand person, Hifumi thought, while Kasha raised some suspicions about him, saying such transparent words.
“Well, I won’t reinstate you in the territorial army. Having someone who left just to later return giving orders would be a bitter pill to swallow, right?”
Even if it’s like this, we’ve got to take things like the morale into consideration, Hifumi said with a smile.
“For the moment, I’ll have you be my guard and secretary, so please give me a hand. A room in this mansion will be prepared for you.”
“T-thank you. I’ll do my best, so please take care of me.”
“Right. There is plenty of work to be done, so work hard.”
Calling the maid, Hifumi ordered her to show Kasha her room, before leaving the room with Origa.
“It’s important to meet the other side’s expectations to some extent, at least.”
Although Origa didn’t understand what Hifumi meant, she did understand that his actions were backed up with confidence in something, so she didn’t say anything else.

The news about the annihilation of the pursuit unit from Vichy was quickly relayed to the central committee from the city accepting one of the fleeing soldiers.
Hearing the news, the committee members who gathered in order to deal with the situation stayed calm.
From the news they’ve collected about Hifumi, it wasn’t a mystery about that they were repelled as the pursuing soldiers only numbered 300. They were, however, dissatisfied with the loss of soldiers due to them fooling around.
“It was a miscalculation by the appointed commanding officer. But it’s pointless to place the blame on a dead man.”
“But we now know what weapons they’re using, so isn’t it fine thinking of this as reconnaissance for the upcoming all-out recapture operation?”
“After all, it’s just some troops gathered from small cities. They’re able to pursue, but aren’t good enough to have serve a purpose on a real battlefield.”
Even before Debold came as an envoy, Vichy had decided to resist with force, so everyone calmly accepted that they were going to fight.

“At any rate, that new viscount… Hifumi, was it? That man is dangerous.”
“If you look at it from the other side, if that Hifumi dies, won’t we stop Orsongrande?”
“But, the letter was signed by princess Imeraria, was it not?”
Amongst them, there were a couple who had seen princess Imeraria in the past. She had given them the impression of a girl unrelated to politics, and kind towards the populace. But these chains of events in Orsongrande have been sending mixed signals.
They didn’t know whether it was because she thought of something after the king’s death, or because Hifumi was discovered, but she disregarded the prince who was supposed to inherit the throne, proactively moving the country herself.
“Either way, like the old man said, if we can stop Hifumi, we can end this without some arbitrary reconciliation.”
“As the goal is to exceed a certain amount of military gains, we need to plan when to request a dialogue.”
“So, about how many soldiers are we going to send?”
In response to that question, the chamberlain who was taking notes distributed a document to all the members.
“15000, huh? The Orsongrande soldiers we need to stop from going from Rhone to Arosel would be the viscount’s territorial soldiers and the border security, around 200 in total. Isn’t this excessive?”
“100 of them crushed our 300 soldiers just about uninjured. We need to leave personnel in the recaptured cities too, so I wouldn’t say it’s excessive.”
“It’s better to have some flexibility, but… aren’t we just throwing money away?”
Saying that, doubts started appearing in the elderly committee member’s head.
(What’s Orsongrande’s goal with attacking Vichy? To expand their territories? Their official reason is retribution, but it’s too severe to just be a matter of honor.)
By no means could he even imagine that it was because of an irrecoverable rift existing between Imeraria and Hifumi.
“No matter how much we rush it, the gathering of the troops will take around 3 weeks. After that, we need to organize them in units, so we need around a month before the recapture operation can be started.
“Hmm. Until then, materials needs to be gathered. How annoying.”
In front of the biggest gathering of troops since the founding of Vichy, the committee was in an uplifted mood. In the place they were normally noisily scrambling for profits, cursing each other, their wishes for victory above profit was ironically what brought them together.
Until now, the committee’s discussions have never proceeded smoothly, so they were having a strange sense of satisfaction.
“Well then, all that’s left is to place our hopes in our soldiers.”
Everyone nodded, and the meeting was finished.

The room Kasha was shown was on the same level as those Origa and Alyssa were living in.
The room was equipped with a splendid bed, and a low desk. The size of the room was at least three times bigger than the room she was living in at the inn in the royal capital.
“Somehow, it’s like we’re living in different worlds.”
Sitting down on the bed and mumbling that, the maid who showed her to the room gave her a tour of the mansion, as per Hifumi’s instructions.
Having received a complete restructure, the first floor had a couple of conference rooms and offices, and in order to make the passage through the entrance easier, making more space, it received an expansion. Inside was now a front desk, with five staff members working side by side.
“It looks like at a guild, when they work side by side like that, but what are they doing?”
“According to Hifumi’s instructions, we’re registering all the citizens and we’re making it obligatory to report births, deaths, and marriages. The reception desk is there to deal with that.”
The maid smoothly responded in a flat voice, but you could hear her respect for Hifumi from her way of talking.
“Isn’t it difficult to do all of that?”

“If they report that someone was born, or married, we give them some congratulatory money, and in case of death, they receive some monetary condolences. In the beginning, everyone were sceptical about it, but after generously selling off the mansion’s artwork, and the staff members becoming better at receiving them, I heard that most of the citizens are receiving it favorably.”
“I see…”
For those who didn’t understand what use all this had, the staff members were explaining with a smile on their faces. For the old woman who came to report a relative’s death, a staff member was expressing their condolences with a smile, while shedding tears.
Kasha couldn’t see it, but behind the counter were the desks of Caim, Brokla, and Paryu, checking that they worked hard. Because of that, even if they were clumsy, the staff members did their best.
Seeing Hifumi being kind towards the populace like that, Kasha was once again seeing a side of him she hadn’t seen before. But isn’t this just a camouflage of some sorts? She shifted her attention towards her doubts filled with some expectation.
If Hifumi wasn’t a bad person, Kasha wouldn’t be able to make herself do it.
“Well then, I’ll introduce the second floor next.”
After being shown the offices and storage spaces, and led back to her room, Kasha threw herself on the bed.
The level of injustice has drastically fallen, and without any chaos ensuing, an impartial, yet thorough, system was imposed in a well-organized way. Even Kasha understood all of that.
Although that’s how it looks, Hifumi might have some terrifying goal in mind, but after speaking to him face-to-face just now, Kasha couldn’t find anything to criticize him for.
As Pajou was sure that just the existence of Hifumi will be the primary factor in wars being caused, she sought Kasha’s cooperation. After listening to Pajou back then, as well as the shock from when Origa chose to stay by Hifumi’s side rather than return with her, she accepted. But in reality, she thought that the governing Hifumi was doing was good.
Shaking her head, she dispelled the doubts arising.
“Unless Hifumi does something unreasonable, it won’t become my turn. If I think of too many unnecessary things and am driven out, it will all have come to nothing. I should also talk with Origa, trying to reconcile with her.”
Besides, she had to start working by Hifumi’s side tomorrow. Getting a better than expected opportunity to observe Hifumi was a stroke of luck. Now, what remains is to work hard in order to not be suspected. Trying to quickly get rid of the fatigue from traveling, Kasha slept until she was called for dinner.

“The slums?”
“Yeah. The creation of the family register is mostly completed, but there’s a problem with the public order in the slums, so it’s difficult for the civil officials to enter.”
Origa explained the information she got from Paryu, the civil official slave in charge of the family register, to Hifumi as he sat by his desk. She didn’t as much as glance on Kasha who stood next to him. Kasha had tried to get in contact with Origa a few times already, but she was brusquely warded off.
“So there’s an area like that.”
“As long as the city is of a certain size, there will be a slum. Even the royal capital has it.”
The political system, aside from not having created a family register, had plenty of people who were forced out from the sphere of a daily normal life due to crime and poverty. Especially in this world where if you leave the city and stray a little off the highway, the possibility of being attacked by a monster skyrocket.
Slaves and penniless people run away from things like crime, entering the underworld, which in itself, would employ its inhabitants. Every day, people are dying, but the same amount of new people are streaming in.
“There are many wannabe adventurers, so there will be people undertaking shady jobs the guild won’t accept. Like the “Hidden Serpent” guys you crushed in the royal capital. Those kind of people mostly come from the slums.”
“According to the information collected from people throughout the city, it seems there is a group managing the slums. We don’t know what their numbers are, but they are involved in things like abductions and robberies.”
For now, it seems they were laying low in order to get a grasp on the new lord’s attitude.

There had been patrols of a couple of soldiers before, but when the inhabitants of the slum saw the soldiers, they went inside their rows of shacks, and didn't come out, apparently.
They didn't know how big of a population there was there, but if the slums were left alone, wouldn't they once again emerge in the city and commit crimes?
"If I receive your permission, I'll go settle that problem."
"Isn't that a little danger…"
Origa's gaze caused Kasha to turn quiet.
"Origa, get along a little with Kasha. I might entrust you with work where you need to work together. As for cleaning up the slums, I'll be doing it."
"I can't be causing trouble to…"
"Origa."
Calling her name, interrupting Origa, Hifumi looked straight at her and smiled.
"This is my job, and it's something I want to do."
"…Understood."
Standing up, Hifumi strapped his katana to his waist, and put on a mantle on top of his usual clothes.
It was something delivered from the royal castle, to show that you are the lord of a territory. On the left shoulder was the royal family's coat of arms, and on the right shoulder was Hifumi's newly designed family crest. It was a symbol with the motif of a katana and a kusarigama.
"I'm off to the slums. I'll entrust it to you two afterwards."
Seeing off Kasha, and the bowing Origa, Hifumi left the office with a wave of the mantle.
While revising the system to quickly put the territory in order in his head, he then thought about the likely coming counterattack from Vichy. If Hifumi's estimations were correct, they just had one short month.
"…I must begin doing the preparations in earnest."
As Hifumi was carefully preparing, he felt the same kind of excitement as from the fight in Rhone. This time, is it 10000? 20000? At the very least, he wouldn't be bored. Moreover, under the influence of Pajou, Imeraria's troops might be joining too.
That would be good, so let's give it a go. Hifumi smiled as he walked with light steps, like a beautiful girl who couldn't calm down before a date. The staff members on the first floor who saw Hifumi walk out, pleasantly thought that him being in a good mood was something nice.

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Chapter 36 – Take Me Home

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While advancing through the city, he firmly affixed the katana to his waist. From his breast pocket he took out a small blade, while spinning it around in a rotating motion on top of his hand, he leaves the residential area.
In order to leave the residential area he passed the buildings of the shopping area arriving at the workshop factory area where the craftsmen were gathered.
Likewise the dwarves, which Hifumi had summoned, were producing the items Hifumi had requested in the arranged workshops in this area. They worked hard to build the devices aiming to defend the entire city.
Taking the opportunity of going to the slums, he decided to take a peek at the workshops. With Pruflas in the center, they were producing spear throwers, rail cars and the rails used by the rail cars.
Those items finished completely were lined up in a row in the corner of the workshop.
Hifumi entered the workshop while lightly raising his hand in greeting. After counting the number of spear throwers, he told Pruflas that it was fine to stop the manufacturing except for the consumption parts.

“Shall we stop the production of weapon parts? If we amass a great number of these powerful weapons that can be used by anyone, we will be able to kill many enemies, won’t we?” (Pruflas)

“If they can be used by anyone, I think there is no particular necessity for the soldiers to use them. This was arranged in order for the city to be safe even if we weren’t here to protect the city. Just that many is already plenty.” (Hifumi)

“Will Lord-sama use one of those?” (Pruflas)

“Saying such a stupid thing. If possible, I want to kill them with my own hands, otherwise there is no point in fighting, don’t you agree? However, if it’s only about winning, Vichy has already lost.” (Hifumi)

Gulping repetitively Pruflas ended up remaining silent as Hifumi talked about the details with a serious facial expression.
Although it was said by everyone that wars were desired by the kings and the nobles for the sake of expanding their territories, it was the first time that there was a lunatic starting a war in order to kill people.

“I plan to move the next battleground to Rhone, Arosel and Fokalore. Steadily producing the rails, I aim to lay the rails rapidly towards Rhone.” (Hifumi)

“Roger. I will alter the placement of personnel. If possible, I’d like you to increase the manpower as well …” (Pruflas)

“If that’s the case, please say that to Origa and the civil official slaves. They shall send some people from their staff. Well then, I am off to do some cleaning.” (Hifumi)

“Cleaning?” (Pruflas)

“As the feudal lord I have to endeavor in making the life in the city comfortable.” (Hifumi)

“Haa” (Pruflas)

Pruflas saw Hifumi off without quite understanding what he meant. Organizing the things said just now within his head and thinking about the placement of personnel, he realized something.

“Arosel after Rhone, Fokalore was it? What kind of situation causes him to push his plans this rapidly? Does Feudal Lord-sama consider losing the current war?” (Pruflas)

Is Fokalore the final defense line that will stall the enemy with spear throwers waiting for reinforcements?
Since he didn’t comprehend even if he thought about it and there was no other choice but to rely on his talent in producing things anyway, he decided to start the production of the requested rails.

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With passing through the workshop area, there were disposal areas with a lot of thrown away trash.
Most of the remains were clothes and wood. As it seems that metal was valuable, it couldn’t be found there.
Among those you could likewise see the bones of animals and some human bones thought to be clothes.
As that place gave off a stench, no one approached it except for the the workers and servants from some place to throw away trash occasionally.
Between the mountains of garbage a narrow pathway ran through coming out next to the slums.

“I guess the smell will stick to the dougi. When I get back I will have to thoroughly wash it.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi fervently believed it to be indispensable drying the dougi in the shade after hand-washing it in lukewarm water. Even as he became the feudal lord, he still washed the clothes himself.
Although there also was the situation of Origa gently telling him to leave it to the maids, this was something he didn’t yield on.
Even the gauntlet produced by Thorn, he thought it to be considerably exhausting to maintenance it. While care-freely walking Hifumi knew through his senses of the two people concealing themselves ahead of the path.
Moreover, those two people ahead stood up.

(Hifumi)

Hifumi drew the katana heaving a sigh. Going towards the presence of the two hidden in the trash, he stabbed them one by one.
There was a feedback.
I think it was instant death for both of them as they didn’t even leak a voice.
After pulling out the katana, it was covered with a red liquid.

“Wh-What have you done!”

Two people ran up from further down the path seeing Hifumi’s sudden action.
Frantically pushing the mountain of trash aside, the two were surprised to find the limp corpses.

“Despite doing nothing, they were stabbed without warning …”

I guess both, the ones having run up here and those having died, are in the latter half of their teens, huh?
It seems one of the dead was a woman.
Even as he is showered in accusing gazes, Hifumi isn’t concerned in the least.

“They tried to do something. Don’t play the victims if you get counter-attacked.” (Hifumi)

“What was that! Although they only planned to threaten you a bit, I will kill you?!”

“Baka” (Hifumi)

The youth, who flared up at Hifumi in rage, died having his heart pierced.

“If you threaten with words saying you will kill someone, be prepared to the extent of resolving the situation with force. It is only ridiculous if a person soon to die says such things.” (Hifumi)

As he was preaching facing the corpses, Hifumi turned his gaze towards the sole survivor. He was unable to stand trembling in fear.

“Th-This easily…” (Young man)

“I have trained desperately to be able to kill this easily. Leaving that aside, I want you to tell me. How many people live in the slums ahead from here?” (Hifumi)

“I-I don’t know! Because there are as many entering as there are those dying before anyone knows…” (Young man)

Using a shrill and nervous voice, it seems he also became incontinent.

“Well then, is there a guy similar to a boss who brings the slum together?” (Hifumi)

“To-Torkemada-san *(T/N: >> Torukemada <<)*, you mean? If it’s that guy, his stronghold is in the church ruins! I-I beg you, don’t ki…” (Young man)

Without listening to the end, Hifumi decapitates the young man.

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“The church ruins, huh?” (Hifumi)

Exiting the trash mountains, a city with worn-out, decaying houses lined up came into view.
Although almost all of them were miserable shacks having their roofs collapsed or completely missing, judging by the presences, it seemed as if a limited amount of people was living there.
Additionally there were hardly any people walking outside.
While feeling the vigilant looks, a building with a different structure became apparent as he nonchalantly walked the the little rest of the path ahead.
It was weathered with its triangular interior and the roof which was spherically cut like an object of art.

“Is this the church by any chance? Which reminds me, I haven’t heard about something like the religion of this world. I will try to ask Origa next time, huh?” (Hifumi)

As usual, Hifumi relied on Origa for the knowledge concerning this world, but since Origa will likely be delighted about the question, *I guess it is fine*, he thought.
Approaching the building appearing to be the church, a group of ten-odd men came out surrounding Hifumi.
All of them frivolously held rusted weapons glaring at him with rough looks.

“Thank you for the trouble of receiving me. Who of you is called something like ‘Torkemada’?” (Hifumi)

He asked without even putting his hand on the katana.

“What’s your business with Torkemada-san? You are wearing strange clothes. Who are you bastard?” (Mob Character A)

“Are those the church ruins?” (Hifumi)

Ignoring the man who asked the questions with saliva flying all over, Hifumi pointed at the building in front of him.

“What about it!” (Mob character A)

“I just wanted to know.” (Hifumi)

He turned into the direction of the previous man twisting and turning around a round small sharp blade.

“Ha?” (Mob character A)

Faster than he could react, the iron wedge was driven into his chin. Besides ripping off the jaw joint, it broke the lower jaw into two pieces.
Without even time for fainting in agony, Hifumi seized his face and crushed the skull, killing him the process.

“Th-This guy!” (Mob Character B)

“Kill him! This fellow is dangerous!” (Mob Character C)

“Something like being dangerous… excuse me for that.” (Hifumi)

Saying this while pouting and complaining, he threw the small blades at their bosom. Drawing the katana and attacking in the same stroke, he sliced the throats of two people in one go.
Pulling it back in the time the two created a fountain of blood, he pierced the neck from behind of yet another person.

“St-Stop …” (Mob Character D)

Kicking the feet of a man throwing down his weapon and trying to flee, he tread on the face around the part of the eyes and broke the skull of the man having fallen down on the spot.
He dodged the sword of the man approaching from his rear causing him to involuntarily thrust the point of his sword into his companion who had his back turned towards him causing his companion to die.
Likewise another person was slain as he put his back into pulling out the sword.
Watching their companions getting killed one-sidedly, the remaining people unconsciously took a step back into the rear.

“Look! There are still another 9 people left, isn’t that right?” (Hifumi)

Breaking into a refreshing smile, he decapitated one more person.
Catching the wrist of a man brandishing his sword, he twisted it and used the man’s own blade to slice his neck.
The person, who was made stumbling by kicking the dead body at him, had his brain stabbed through the eyeballs on the spot when he raised his face.

“It’s enough already, please stop!” (Mob Characer E)

“Not happening. Die.” (Hifumi)

“Ple…” (Mob Character E)

His pleading for his own life was denied with a single word.
The pitiful man passed away having his skull cut apart down to the nose.

At the time that man collapsed with his eyeballs spilling out on both sides due to the impact of the slashing attack, someone came out of the church.

“That’s enough!”

A man of approximately 40 years having a thoroughly tempered stature appeared.
Carrying a large, well-maintained sword on his shoulders, he advanced to the front of the church which was scattered with dead bodies.
Hifumi, feeling that presence, wrapped it up by cutting the femur of a person and throwing him down.
At the moment the man raised his voice in order to restrain him, Hifumi aimed at the carelessness of that other man ceasing his movement and now that man was helpless.
Hifumi waited for him to die from blood loss as he sank in his own pool of blood.

“This! What are you!”

As Hifumi continued to kill even more without even listening to the restraint, the disturbing man drew his sword and went around in front of Hifumi, parrying Hifumi’s downward swung katana.

“Hou …” (Hifumi)

In the case of the other guys tattered swords those were cut apart disregarding the slashing attacks. But, while the katana penetrated halfway into the thick sword blade of this sword, it was also stopped.

“In spite of being this thin, what a strength!”

Desperately enduring the unusual pressure, the man gritting his teeth was sent flying with a kick into his abdomen making him tumbling on the ground.
Hifumi’s curiosity was slightly piqued by the man who quickly stood up and fixed his sword stance.

“You are different from the other trash. This bunch has a slightly capable fellow mixed in, huh?” (Hifumi)

“You aren’t someone from the slum? What the hell is your business here?”

“I came here to meet the manager. Then, since these belligerent guys came and surrounded me, I killed them.” (Hifumi)

‘It’s simple.’ Although he was laughing, Hifumi didn’t relax his force to pin him down with the katana even a tiny bit.
Even the surviving men had no other choice but to observe from the distance.

“That Bifron-san *(T/N: >> Bifuron <<)* is …” (Mob Character F)

From their mutterings Hifumi learned the name of the man in front of him.

“Wa-Wait! If you have conditions, I will listen to them. I am sorry for our underlings causing you trouble!” (Bifron)

Upon Bifron’s words, Hifumi all of a sudden withdrew his katana.
In contrast to Bifron, who was breathing heavily, Hifumi didn’t have a single pearl of sweat.
In addition to his ability, even his mentality is that of a monster , Bifron thought.
The fallen corpses of his companions in the vicinity had no needless injuries, there were merely the attacks necessary to kill them visible.
No hesitation could be seen.

“Let me meet the manager of this place.” (Hifumi)

“… I understand. Follow me.” (Bifron)

Bifron had no choice to waver on whether to take the man in front of his eyes to Torkemada's place or not.
He judged it to be better to take him there rather than having everyone here getting killed.
Telling the surviving bunch to clean up the corpses, Bifron stepped into the church ruins leading Hifumi.

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Other than in regards to Imeraria's life, the Third Knight Unit played a leading part in the advancing plans for the troops organisation at the royal castle.
Those were reinforcements readied under the pretext of supporting Hifumi's territory as well as the new territories against Vichy who was thought to start an offensive.
In anticipation a number of around 5000 soldiers was prepared and they began their march after having been assigned in units to each, Pajou and Midas.
Although Imeraria had to handle the governmental affairs, she also actively interfered with the army.
As the troops were usually led by a soldier, the Second Knight Unit didn't find this very amusing.
Even if she was the princess, a woman meddling with the military and naval affairs, the top brass of the Second Knight Unit wasn't able to stomach that.

"By all rights, we of the Second Knight Unit should be expected to become the bellwethers of the battle." (Captain)

An elderly man, having his own personal office with the King's castle, calmly said this. It is Stifels *(T/N: >> Sutiferusu <<)* who is the head of a earl household and employed as captain of the Second Knight Unit.
The ones standing at attention and listening to that speech are the two existing vice-captains.

"It is as the captain says. Originally, if it was by the king's order, it would be a logical move for us to lead the soldiers as they head into battle!" (Vice-Captain A)

"Be that as it may, as the king has passed away and the prince still hasn't finished the coronation yet, isn't she abusing her authority with this?" (Vice-Captain B)

Same as Stifels, both vice-captains also seemed to obviously bad-mouth the Princess' judgement.
Having said that she was abusing her authority, in reality there were no clearly stated regulations in regards to the chain of command within royalty or the roles of the Knight Units.
With the queen wasting away and the prince also being too young, there was likewise a valid reason for Imeraria taking a leading role in carrying out the governmental affairs. Especially for that reason the royal castle also kept functioning without problems.
Due to the civil officials and their-likes understanding this, they followed the Princess' instructions obediently.
But, military and naval officers seemed to have a tendency to be obstinate where customs were concerned. While the Third Knight Unit, who originally belonged to the Princess faction, was fine with the pliable support, the First and Second Knight Unit, whose treatment became worse by each day passing, bore resentment in opposition.

"You-know-what, I think the lass only gathered the soldiers for the sake of looking cool in front of the guy she fell in love with. It is even fine for her to get along with the cowards from the Third Knight Unit in that game of fake campaign." (Vice-Captain A)

"However, as things are going, since the Third Knight Unit will increase their achievements once again…" (Vice-Captain B)

The Second Knight Unit was impatient. The Third Knight Unit's achievements rose with such things like the smuggling affair of the Marquis solidifying their high estimation and connection with the Princess. In comparison to

that, the Second Knight Unit wouldn't be able to obtain any achievements this time either.
As the Second Knight Unit's reputation took a huge blow with not being able to protect the king and as there was also the matter of disposing the problem child called Gothras who was affiliated with the Second Knight Unit, they were disgruntled as they weren't given any place to participate actively in the first place.

"The reinforcements together with the military forces of the territories amounts to about 5000 troops. Vichy will come to recapture the territories using all its strength. Although it might be possible to stop a defeat, something like an overwhelming victory will be impossible. This isn't anything to be anxious about. Also, apart from that, we should be able to appear on the stage to earn the victory." (Stifels)

"The stage aiming for victory, is it?" (Vice Captain A)

Passing the two vice-captains a signed decree close at hand, Stifels stood up.

"Right now it has become a standoff with Horant at the national border. Let's show them that we can handle enlarging the realm as well, shall we not? It isn't something that can only be done by that greenhorn, I will show the proof of that." (Stifels)

"That's right!" (Vice-Captain A)

"As one would expect of Your Excellency! You have a totally different point of view than us!" (Vice-Captain B)

While the two vice-captains were severally praising him, Stifels nodded in response and declared with a bold attitude,

"Gather the soldiers! The true strength of the Second Knight Unit shall resound within Orsongrande, no, in the whole world!" (Stifels)

Watching the figures of his subordinates hurrying to organize the troops with exalted facial expressions, Stifels nodded in absolute satisfaction.

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Chapter 37 – Candy

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Entering the ruins of the church, inside a spacious hall, where the altar originally stood, there was a middle-aged man sitting in a huge wooden chair, surrounded by several standing men. Probably his subordinates.
Bifron jogged forward, whispering something in the ear of the middle-aged man.
Having listened to what Bifron was saying, the man rudely looked at Hifumi, and started talking in a deep, resounding voice.

“It seems some of our guys are indebted to you, but who are you?” (Torkemada)

“The new Lord. Are you Torkemada?” (Hifumi)

“Correct. So, what business does the Lord have, coming all the way to our garbage heap?” (Torkemada)

Torkemada glared with bloodshot eyes. He had probably been able to daunt many people with that gaze, but Hifumi didn’t really care.

“I came to ask you whether you want to die, or follow my orders.” (Hifumi)

“Hah.” (Torkemada)

Laughing scornfully, Torkemada put a nearby wooden flask towards his mouth. The content smelled like alcohol.

“I heard you were the manager here in the slums. I was thinking of gathering the inhabitants here and have them choose whether to submit or not.” (Hifumi)

“Hahaha, don’t be so hurried, youngster. So, what will you do if I don’t obey? Set the soldiers after us to kill us? There was an aristocrat making the same demands before, but we sent him home as a corpse.” (Torkemada)

Speaking in a joking manner, the surrounding subordinates started laughing.
Hifumi didn’t respond, or rather, he didn’t really listen to what Torkemada said.

“I don’t care about that. Just do it. Also, you smell. You should at least wash your body.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi frowned, waving his left hand around in an imitation of Torkemada. Torkemada himself stopped laughing, and put on a grim look.

“That’s the kind of serious look you should listen with. This is the moment where your life or death is decided.” (Hifumi)

“Don’t get carried away. Don’t think a youngster like you can act brave here in the slums, and then return in one piece.” (Torkemada)

He once again threatened in a deep voice, but Hifumi only responded with a sigh.

“I can’t get through to you, can I?” (Hifumi)

With a rattling sound, Hifumi retrieved the metal chigiriki he used in the battle in Rhone. Although, the retractable function for the chain had broken, so it was more like a flail with a long handle. As he couldn't fix it on his own, he could only use it as it was for now.

"Oh, you want to fight?" (Torkemada)

Judging that it was a weapon, Torkemada grinned broadly and turned to Bifron standing beside him, about to tell Bifron to be Hifumi's opponent.
The chigiriki made a dull sound as its weight was driven into his temple.
Hitting the weak part of the cranium and continuing straight ahead, it clearly reached his brain.

"Move before you ask someone whether to fight or not. Idiot." (Hifumi)

Hifumi nimbly pulled back the chain and swung it around, as Torkemada fell down from from his chair with the whites in his eyes showing.
The underlings couldn't understand what happened for a short moment, but came to their senses as they heard the sound of the dead body hitting the floor.

"You asshole! Kill him!" (Mob A)

"Wait!" (Bifron)

As the subordinates were about to draw their swords, Bifron hurriedly commanded them to stop.

"Why are you stopping us!?" (Mob A)

"Bifron, he killed Torkemada! We can't let him go back alive!" (Mob B)

"Even if we attack in a group, we can't win. Torkemada died because he didn't understand that… Lord, could you please give us your name?" (Bifron)

Having somehow calmed down the subordinates voicing their dissatisfaction, Bifron showed that his hand had separated from the sword.

"It's Hifumi. Your manager has died, so Bifron, can you substitute for him?" (Hifumi)

"Manager… well, he only managed the people here. As we don't have a grasp on the huge number of people in the slums, we don't know where people are." (Bifron)

"Aahh… So it's like that. What a bother." (Hifumi)

Hifumi scratched his head, shaking the chains. The listless Bifron took that moment to quietly ask him a question.

"I'd chose to follow you over dying. If I weren't going to follow you, will the soldiers come again?" (Bifron)

Torkemada was talking as if he was filled with composure, but during Viscount Hagenti's rule, soldiers were dispatched to the slums. They had huge losses, and while they managed to drive back the soldiers with force in the end, a considerable amount of people in the slums died. Only after running around, confirming that all the influential people back then had died, did Torkemada start behaving like the boss of this gym. And since joining an appropriate group makes it easier, Bifron had joined Torkemada.
If soldiers were now dispatched like they were back then, the people in the slums would easily be disposed of.

"Why are you asking whether I'd send soldiers?" (Hifumi)

"Well, nobles and Lords are like that, so I figured…" (Bifron)

Bam. The sound of the chigiriki hitting the floor made Bifron take a step back in surprise.

“If someone obstructs me, I have the the privilege to kill them. I won’t let anyone else take that away from me.” (Hifumi)

Everyone in the church ruins felt as if asking what the hell Hifumi was talking about.
Although nobody, even Origa, comprehended it, it was the same reason why Hifumi stood on the main street in Rhone by himself.
He even gave such strange order saying that it was alright to only kill those guys who entered the side roads.

“I don’t understand the minds of guys who use their subordinates to kill people.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi angrily snorted with a “fun~” as no one kept up with him.

“The conversation has deviated. As it has become tiresome, I will leave it to you afterwards. Tomorrow morning, those who obey me will lose the status of trash, the others will have to get out. Those remaining in the city will be killed. I think that’s easy enough to understand.” (Hifumi)

“W-Whether they are going to believe this story or not …” (Bifron)

“It doesn’t matter. It will be their end if they aren’t able to sense the danger.” (Hifumi)

Biding his farewell, Hifumi gave them a light greeting of “see ya tomorrow!” as if he was a student while leaving.
Bifron sank to the floor with a thump.

“Bi-Bifron-san …” (Mob A)

“You lot better obey him as well if you don’t want to die. This here are the slums. You will die if you insist.” (Bifron)

Seeing him having his view facing towards Torkemada, the other men one by one told Bifron that they would obey.
Apparently it was the simple logic of obeying Bifron who is stronger than them.

“Ah, will we keep this a secret from the other groups so that we can comfortably get rid of the guys from the other groups?” (Mob B)

As several others agreed to that sort of idea being proposed, Bifron told them to better stop it.

“What do you think will that Lord-sama do at the time he learns that we hadn’t passed on the announcement to the other groups?” (Bifron)

Standing up, Bifron looked at everybody.

“Didn’t you listen? Anyone who becomes an obstacle will be killed by that guy.” (Bifron)

As Bifron left the church ruins to go inform the other groups, the other guys also tagged along.

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The expression ‘civil official slave’ is a word coined by Hifumi. With the exception of Fokalore it hadn’t circulated yet.
Although their position as slaves, and their status as civil officials made the people confused in the beginning, but when they started actually working, they just said “ah, so that’s what the expression means”, and understood.
With the administration service being completed, the war reserve funds could be definitely collected under the name of taxes. Other than Kasha’s principle of saying “something is wrong with these people”, only the 5 civil official slaves were put to work like slaves just as that title implied.

The result of tallying the family register was the knowledge of there being close to 50.000 people in Fokalore even if the slums were excluded. Although there were dozens of staff members, only 5 people managing the government affairs by themselves doubtlessly was a matter of overwork.
Attached under Alyssa, Miyukare took part in the office work on matters closely related to the territorial army. She considered that to be an especially comfortable situation for herself.
In reality the management related to armament was easy too as the loss was originally small as well. Before Hifumi became aware of it, the method to learn how to use the tools and arms made by the dwarves became difficult as those were unfamiliar.
For the women who served as civil officials in the capital this was a new workplace supported by a peaceful environment without having superiors that acted self-important or nobles making fun of them for being women of common birth.

“A-Ano … Miyukare-san, I don’t understand this, but …” (Alyssa)

Alyssa was scanning through the documents as if clinging to the massive desk in the office with its long fur carpet spread out. Someone who came approaching with a *tota tota* timidly held out the documents to Miyukare at her secretary desk.

“Alyssa-sama. You asked for the subordinate standing in front of me, right? You have to be prepared to entrust substantial things to those below as one standing above others.” (Miyukare)

“A-Ano … I am sorry …” (Alyssa)

Alyssa got openly depressed as she was lectured while receiving the documents.
You could see her already small body becoming even smaller.

“Moreover, because the document is incorrect here regarding the count of people, it can’t be used as final count. Since there aren’t 200 people with even the recruited soldiers, you have to understand at least this much, please.” (Miyukare)

“A..u …” (Alyssa)

As it was something possessing comparatively strong backbone, Miyukare saw Alyssa ending up completely dispirited.
She tightened her face, that almost began to grin, with will-power, placed a hand on Alyssa and changed to a soft voice.

“Alyssa-sama, I am very sorry for saying such harsh things. But it is fine to leave such miscellaneous tasks to me.” (Miyukare)

“But, if that’s the case, I think it will become difficult for Miyukare-san …” (Alyssa)

What a lovely child. It took Miyukare all her effort to withhold the nosebleed due to Alyssa who wasn’t even ten years younger than her. Barely, without revealing her facial expression, she pretended to be calmly thanking her.

“Such a lowly slave like me receiving such consideration, thank you very much. I was appointed as Alyssa-sama’s assistant. Since this is my duty, please rely on me without holding back.” (Miyukare)

“Is that so? … Although I don’t quite understand, thanks Miyukare-san!” (Alyssa)

As she endured with a mind of steel to not embrace the brightly smiling Alyssa closely, Hifumi entered the room without even knocking.
Of course he had taken a hot bath and changed the dougi smelling like garbage.

“Ah, Hifumi-san!” (Miyukare)

“… Don’t leak such sickening mood.” (Hifumi)

“Ara, you can say that it is an important element for smoothly handling the work that the subordinate and the superior get along with each other.” (Miyukare)

Hifumi wasn’t good at talking with Miyukare.
As she didn’t even care about speaking her mind without holding back even though being a slave, he felt some indescribably bad affinity with her.
(I think I am to blame for not seeing through such a fellow, but …) (Hifumi)
Her hobby doesn’t match her high-quality, Hifumi recognized about Miyukare.
Standing out in calculation and practical work experience amongst the 5 people, she is the most “capable personnel” since she also possesses experience as civil official, he assessed.

“How can I help you, Hifumi-san?” (Miyukare)

“Since I will clean out the slums tomorrow, you have to assign a number of people to prepare dealing with the aftermath.” (Hifumi)

Miyukare’s side reacted sensitively towards Hifumi’s words.

“… Have you done something again?” (Miyukare)

After the defense battle at Rhone, they had reorganized the territorial army, reviewed the weapons damage and ordered repairs and brand new ones.
Furthermore while being rushed by Caim of the financial affair department, they calculated the final expenses.
Miyukare recalled the situation of not even having time to sleep.

“You just have to gather some manpower. Take someone being in charge of the family register including around 20 people and wait outside the slums to register those guys as residents tomorrow morning. Assign an appropriate workplace like a workshop or whatever.” (Hifumi)

This will reduce the labor shortage, because of that Hifumi had a complacent mood. Miyukare was at her wits’ end.

“Will it prove successful to use the guys from the slums?” (Miyukare)

“This will depend on your guys’ education. I leave it to you, military director Alyssa” (Hifumi)

“Ah, yes! Understood!” (Alyssa)

After hitting Alyssa’s head with a *pon pon*, Hifumi immediately left.

“Again a troublesome matter …” (Miyukare)

Although her deployment was like playing house, given that for some reason the soldiers of the territorial army listened well to the things Alyssa said, there were only few troubles in relation to the soldiers of this territory.
A large number of people grasped the situation of Alyssa, who was moving around her small body restlessly, having no dignity and yet she oddly excelled at something like issuing quick instructions.
Even if it might be fine because of Hifumi’s discerning eye, Miyukare absolutely couldn’t accept it since it was somehow vexing.

“Well then, we should prepare to meet the Lord-sama’s unreasonable demands.” (Miyukare)

“Miyukare-san, you are not allowed to speak bad words about Hifumi-san in such way, okay?” (Alyssa)

“… I am very sorry. My true opinion leaked out.” (Miyukare)

How could such excellent child become emotionally attached to such bloodstained man? Miyukare was boiling with jealousy.

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It was the time to finally decide the details of the troops organisation fielded against Vichy when a letter from Horant to Imeraria arrived.
Looking at the delivered documents which took a full 5 days to arrive from the city closest to Horant, Imeraria held the middle of her forehead feeling a headache.

“Imeraria-sama?” (Pajou)

Due to the anxious words, Imeraria raised her face and looked at Pajou.

“Pajou, it is written here that Horant claims the massive killing of citizens in Rhone to be the responsibility of our country. However going by the details I read in your report the cause was apparently some magic tool from Horant.” (Imeraria)

“I swear that there are no lies to be found in the contents of the report you have received from me … Will Horant cooperate with Vichy?” (Pajou)

“It seems so. Although I think it won’t come as far as an invasion because they have to ascertain the validity of Vichy doing something like “Revenge” against our country going by the contents of the letter … I wonder whether I should gather some soldiers on the main road on Horant’s side just to be sure.” (Imeraria)

In spite of being remembered of a certain person being first on the list of many hot-blooded people causing many to be troubled while Imeraria was worried, Pajou drew close all of a sudden.

“However, regarding this matter, there is movement to dispatch troops in the direction of Horant in the name of Captain Stifels of the Second Knight Unit.” (Pajou)

“What is he selfishly …” (Imeraria)

“That is, it seems he spread a rumor of having somehow obtained the approval from Prince Ayperos *(T/N: >> Aiperosu <<)*” (Pajou)

Imeraria learning that the name of her younger brother was used without the person himself even knowing about it had a hunch that he wouldn’t comprehend it even if she explained it to him.
Although she was an amateur as well, this was even more so the case for the prince, who doesn’t know a thing about military affairs.
Unrelated to the royal castle’s intentions, different to Imeraria who had been moving for the sake of the masses, it resulted in him almost never leaving the castle under the protection of his mother. Even Imeraria was surprised at the degree of him being raised ignorant of the ways of the world.
For this reason, even if her younger brother inherited the crown, she considered to support him herself.

“With all due respect, it appears the prince faction is opposed to the matters of the princess who is thought to be intimate with Hifumi-san …” (Pajou)

“I have no intention to compete for the hegemony with my younger brother.” (Imeraria)

“I-I am very sorry. I have said too much.” (Pajou)

Being slapped with a warning, Pajou hurriedly shut up.

“This before an important battle. I don’t want to cause unnecessary losses. I don’t want to expand the disputes within the king’s castle either. Let’s do it in the way I ratified this time. But, you should do your best to draw in the capable talented people amongst the soldiers into the Third Knight Unit.” (Imeraria)

“I will obey respectfully.” (Pajou)

“… Though there is something I am thinking about, in the end it has become nothing but completely brutal matters. Even though I wanted to take care of the life of the people becoming a lot calmer until just a little while ago.” (Imeraria)

Now she was only thinking of wanting to start moving quickly against Vichy. Imeraria gently covered her eyes with her slender fingers.

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Chapter 38 – Sunday Morning

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Wrapped in the refreshing morning sunlight, a huge group of slightly dirty people were restlessly gathered. They were those who listened to Bifron's call and exited the slums.
Listening to Bifron, whose strength was recognized within the slums, and seeing his proof in the form of Torkemada's corpse, a little less than 150 people had gathered and followed the trash-filled street, and exited the slums. Although there were a lot of men as well, almost all the women and kids had come out. They didn't have either the power or the intention to go against the lord.
Bifron and his comrades who had been running around the slums for the whole night, were completely exhausted. But once they thought about what would happen from now on, their tension and sleepiness was blown away.

"Good morning!" (Alyssa)

Amidst the noisy conversations expressing their uneasiness, a loud cheerful greeting was heard.
As he looked over, Bifron could see a young lady walking over, waving her hands. Behind her were many men and women looking like government officials, as well as several soldiers.

"Old man, you and the rest of the people are those who exited the slums, right?" (Alyssa)

"Ah, yes." (Bifron)

"I'm the military director in this city, Alyssa. Hifumi told me that I'll be here to receive you. I want the men over there, the women over there, and the kids, along with their mothers, over there." (Alyssa)

As she was giving instructions to Caim, Origa, and the other responsible people in order to quickly move along, a man stepped out from behind Bifron.

"If this is a joke, listening to a small kid like you, I'm not laughing! Don't make fun of us just because we're from the slums!"

It was the same man who first raised his voice in rage when Hifumi killed Torkemada.

"Eh… But…" (Alyssa)

"Considering Bifron's face, just obediently get out of here. We don't have any reason to get along with some kid's play."

Drawing closer, Alyssa hesitantly looked behind her, and saw Origa give her a nod, as she stood with her arms crossed, with a daunting pose.

"Uhh… There!" (Alyssa)

Under the pressure of Origa's gaze, Alyssa resolved herself and swung the tobiguchi she held in her hand.
Swinging down, with her eyes relatively closed, the pointy end of the tobiguchi accurately pierced the middle of the head.

“Like that.” (Alyssa)

Standing aside Alyssa, Origa slowly talked to the frightened citizens.

“The people going against our lord Hifumi’s intentions will be dealt with. As we aren’t planning on keeping unnecessary baggage, we need to deal with it. If you understand, then quickly move as we told you to.” (Origa)

Within the ambiance not expressing either consent or refusal, even Bifron remained silent, while the men went towards their gathering place.

“Alyssa, you did that well. There’s no need to listen to what guys like him are saying.” (Origa)

“I wonder if that really was a good thing …” (Alyssa)

Origa gave a kind smile to Alyssa, who still didn’t have any self-confidence.

“Have some self-confidence. You just dealt with one of Hifumi’s enemies, after all.” (Origa)

“T-that’s right!” (Alyssa)

They brought about a peaceful atmosphere, but the people around them looked at them with fear in their gazes. At this point, Hifumi came walking completely relaxed.

“Oh, you’ve already started talking?” (Hifumi)

“You’re slow, Lord.” (Myukare)

As Myukare, who came with Alyssa, said that, Hifumi let out a big yawn.

“I was talking with Pruflas last night and we got a bit excited, so it ended up being quite late. Don’t glare at me just because I overslept a bit.” (Hifumi)

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“Hifumi, leave this to us.” (Origa)

“Yeah, I’ll leave it to you. Well then, I’ll be tidying up the rest. Alyssa, send some people to clean up around dusk.” (Hifumi)

“Understood!” (Alyssa)

So that’s the Lord? The residents from the slum were talking to each other. After Alyssa clapped her hands to get their attention and once again gave them directions, the remaining people quickly began to move.

“Origa, as planned, the men will help Pruflas. The women will help the staff members, and you’ll be educating the kids.” (Hifumi)

“Understood. You take care as well.” (Origa)

Lightly waving his hand towards towards Origa who was doing an elegant bow, Hifumi went towards the road to the slums.

“Hifumi, what exactly did you talk to Pruflas about?” (Alyssa)

“About new weapons and war devices.” (Hifumi)

“Eh?” (Alyssa)

Origa promptly replied to the question Alyssa muttered.

“Weapons to use we have to make in a hurry and planning the work for the inhabitants of the slums. It was a talk about what has to be constructed in preparation for the war.” (Origa)

We left together the first thing this morning, so why do you know this? Alyssa thought to herself. But except having a bad feeling about it, she didn’t ask anything more.

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Just like what Origa for some reason knew, Hifumi had thrown a few new weapons into his dark magic storage.
While walking down the trashy street, he withdrew one of them.
It was three, 90 centimeter long iron rods, connected with chains. A so called three-section staff. Just like the chigiriki, it could be connected to become one long staff. But sadly, the mechanism in the chigiriki had quickly broken, so it was made simpler in this weapon. In order to raise the deadliness of the staff, the metal ends were sharpened.
Breathing through his nose, and squinting his eyes because of the bright sun, Hifumi entered the slums, aimlessly wandering around its dirty streets, searching for any anyone’s presence.
Suddenly, he stopped in front of an old house and kicked down the front door.
Stepping inside, he found a bearded old man lying down in the dark. The smell of alcohol filled the air.

“Ah, what’s this?”

Whether he was drunk or just half-asleep, the old man’s eyes were flickering around before Hifumi thrust the pointy end of his staff into the old man’s throat.

“Ghue.”

The old man died without making any sound.
Confirming that the staff’s pointy end didn’t break after hitting the neck bone, Hifumi was satisfied, as he went towards the next house.
As he disposed of a few more people in a similar way, making sure that the staff was easy to use, he saw a group of men gathered on the road. Upon sighting Hifumi, the men raised their weapons and started shouting.

“Did you say you were going to deal with us, brat!?”

“Swinging around that weird stick, who do you think you are!?”

They look just like some countryside delinquents, Hifumi thought, as he let out a chuckle.

“I’m the Lord. It’s fine if you don’t remember that, though.” (Hifumi)

There were 8 of them.
Hifumi rushed over to the guy who spoke first, in the middle. With a swing like he was playing golf, he drove the staff into the other guy’s crotch.
With a sound like something was crushed, the guy died in shock.

“Hii….”

The man next to him let out a scream as he witnessed the scene.
Letting his hands go of the staff, Hifumi withdrew a jitte from his within his breast pocket. It wasn’t the cross kind, but rather the kind the policemen during the Edo period used. It was an about 30 centimeters long rod of iron, with a

pointy end. As they didn't have the right materials, there was no tassel, to Hifumi's disappointment.
Thrusting the jitte in his right hand with an overhand grip, he intimidated the nearest guy.

"W-what will you do with such a short…"

While he was saying that, Hifumi stabbed the jitte into his kneecap, not given a chance to scream before his neck was snapped with a foot.
Hifumi deflected a sword incoming from the side with his right hand, before hitting the attacker's chest like a hammer.
A dull vibrating sound was heard as the man dropped the sword, and feebly fell down on the ground.
Jumping towards one of the men who stepped back in fear, Hifumi thrust the jitte into his left eye, then using the handle in the left hand to send him flying with a hit to the back of the head.

"3 guys left, huh?" (Hifumi)

"W-wait a second! I was opposed to this kind of… Hiii!"

"Shut up." (Hifumi)

Closing in on the frightened man barehanded, Hifumi snatched his arm and pulled him down on the ground with his face down, before before strongly trampling down on the back of his head, crushing it.
As the man stopped moving after having his head crushed on the hard ground, Hifumi let go of his hand and pulled out his favourite kusarigama.

"Y-you beast!"

"Who's a beast?" (Hifumi)

Shifting his position, Hifumi knocked down the desperately attacking man with his leg, ignoring him as he fell.
Another person hesitatingly poising with a sword attacked, clinging to Hifumi, pushing him down.

"Geh." (Hifumi)

The moment he was pushed down, Hifumi used his body weight to drive the sickle into the man's heart, ending his life.
Looking at Hifumi slowly standing up having his face dyed red with blood stains, the fallen man wasn't able to get up any more.

"W-waah…"

Being affected by the blood-soaked sickle held by Hifumi as he slowly approached, the man was frozen in fear.
Like he was cutting grass, Hifumi slashed with the sickle, and the last person died.

"Hmm…." (Hifumi)

Picking up the dropped weapons, Hifumi checked them all.

"Aah, it's bent." (Hifumi)

The jitte he had thrust through into an eye socket, piercing the cranium has some brain matter stuck to it, which he wiped off with some paper. Looking at it closely, it was slightly bent due to the impact when he struck with it.

"It really bent … It was meant as a test, but I guess stuff like this happens." (Hifumi)

Cleaning the weapons he used, and putting them away into the storage, Hifumi was hungry, so he left the slums to

find a food stall to get some food. After eating, he returned to the slums, he aimlessly walked around until dusk, disposing of another 30 or so people.
They were mostly rash young men who had confidence in their skills, but none of them managed to even wound Hifumi.
In the time he continued the stroll of slaughtering while being bathed in blood, with the exception of the already broken jitte, he also tested out the three-section staff several times. Since the basics of thrusting and also the basics of the katana's hassou, for such things as cutting at the lower leg and shaving off, were entirely on his regular practice menu, it flowed gently and was easy to use. *(T/N: hassou is a kendo stance, as far as I understand it)*
Having almost finished moving through the whole area of the slum, Hifumi felt a strong thirst for blood, as he took a step to the side.
With a sound of cutting through the air, an arrow lodged into the inside of a run-down house.
Turning around, a man was preparing to shoot another arrow. He was two meters tall, holding a huge bow that he was drawing to the very limit.
Feeling happy about being ambushed, Hifumi displayed a smile as he drew his katana.

"So you're the last one. With your huge frame, archery isn't the only thing you're good at, right?" (Hifumi)

The man looked at the club hanging on his waist, but without responding to the provocation, he aimed a second arrow at Hifumi.
With the katana in an underhand grip, Hifumi put the katana in front of him as he lowered his body. It was an old stance he was taught a long time ago by his master, which was used against arrows. It was the first time he used it in actual combat, however.
(It's a stance limiting the area he can hit, then defending with the katana) (Hifumi)
Trying it out in reality, Hifumi was quite tense, so he deliberately relaxed his arm a bit.
Moving the katana on reflex, a broken arrow fell down by his feet with a dull sound.

"What!?"

As the man didn't think Hifumi would be able to knock down the arrow, he opened his eyes wide, not drawing another arrow.
Hifumi used that moment to shorten the distance, and just as if making a paint stroke, he slashed at the man with the katana. The man threw down his bow and made an evasive roll.
Doing that, the man grasped the one meter long wooden club at his waist and alertly put himself into position. As far as Hifumi was concerned, this was a satisfying opponent.

"Nice, nice. You're different from those other idiots." (Hifumi)

"… You're a monster."

Facing the loudly laughing Hifumi as he quickly changed the underhand grip on the katana to an overhand one, the man made a bitter face.

"I'm just a normal person who put forth a great amount of effort." (Hifumi)

If you asked 10 people who knew Hifumi, 15 would tell you otherwise.
The man was silent as he swung down the club, but Hifumi steadily retreated, avoiding the blow.

"And with a continuous motion!"

While the man was brandishing the club above his head, Hifumi slipped in below his stomach, and tackled the man with the shoulder, making him fall.
It made a dull sound, but the man still unsteadily stood up.

“You’re quite sturdy, aren’t you?” (Hifumi)

“You and your strange movements……”

Cracking his neck with a flushed face, the man once again readied his club.

“You were alright with the bow, but the way you’re swinging the club is dull and boring. Don’t you have anything else?” (Hifumi)

“You!”

As the man approached with vehement vigor without affirming nor disagreeing, Hifumi started to get tired of him. Hifumi then remembered something else Pruflas had prepared, and withdrew it from his storage, sprinkling it on the ground.

“Huh!? Aaaah!”

Stepping on the caltrops Hifumi had strewn out on the ground, with all of his might, the man couldn’t bear it and dropped the club, falling down on the ground.

“As expected, you couldn’t bear this.” (Hifumi)

Avoiding the caltrops covering the ground, Hifumi gently thrust the katana into the heart of the man, as he had fainted in agony.

“It was the first time I’ve used it, but it could be nice to use once in a while. It reduces the tension, though.” (Hifumi)

He gathered the scattered caltrops.

“… Gathering them is a pain …” (Hifumi)

After collecting all of the caltrops and returning them to his dark magic storage, he realized he could’ve just opened a hole on the ground and directly collected them into his storage, and felt a bit sad about it, as he returned to the Lord’s mansion.
Thus, the slums that had been a garbage heap in Fokalore since forever, had been emptied of inhabitants in just one day.

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Because Origa and the five slave civil officials put the gathered manpower from the slum to their best use, Fokalore quickly underwent a change.
Thanks to the manpower from the slums, the rails reaching Arosel had been finished, so they started testing it by sending goods and people.
The city’s outer wall was also reinforced, and the entrances facing both royal capital, and the one facing Arosel were improved.
The women from the slums initially received a cold shoulder from the city’s residents, but as they worked hard with cleaning up the city and collecting household garbage, the inhabitants generally came to accept them.
Just being the feudal lord, Hifumi left all the decision making to the civil officials only making a rough draft for this project and occasionally confirming the progress. Alyssa also didn’t approach the governmental operations excusing herself with the words 「I don’t quite understand.」 The number provided to help out from the territorial army decreased as well as they were worked to death at combat training according to Hifumi’s and Miyukare’s instructions.
Naturally, as the style of receiving the instructions from Hifumi and assigning the work following those became established for Origa, some amongst the residents misunderstood Origa to be Hifumi’s wife. But there were also

some thinking the feudal lord is a woman.
With Hifumi himself doing only the minimum of necessary document signing, his daily life basically started with finishing the morning practise and no sooner than after taking a hot bath he went missing without anyone noticing. Today being the same, Hifumi vanished from his office going on a trip under the pretext of test running the arrival of the rail car at Arosel and eliminating the monsters along the highway on the occasion.

“Today he is absent as well?” (Caim)

The civil official slave Caim, known for his notorious “impudence” amongst the staff members, muttered without a change in his expression seeing Kasha house-sitting in Hifumi’s office.

“Caim-san, huh? I came to this room right at the moment when he departed.” (Kasha)

“Can you do me favor of detaining him a bit? It would be a great help.” (Caim)

“Don’t ask the impossible.” (Kasha)

With a face where you didn’t know whether he was laughing or crying, Caim left the office silently after looking at Kasha for a short while.
As if replacing him, Origa entered.

“Ara …” (Origa)

Origa noticing there was no one but Kasha inside the room, she tried to leave the room right away, but Kasha stopped her by calling out to her.

“Origa, if it’s Hifumi-san you want to speak with, I can hear you out.” (Kasha)

Stopping her feet, Origa fixed her eyes on Kasha.
In difference to Caim, her face showed that she suppressed something she wanted to say.

“… No. After Hifumi-sama has returned, I will tell him directly.” (Origa)

Then, Origa, who was about exit the room, once again stopped.

“Kasha, since you are a guard, even if only in name, how about doing a little bit of training? Because we can expect a large-scale battle with Vichy very soon going by the reports from the scouts, come and participate in the training to see how Alyssa has arranged the territorial army to move.” (Origa)

After spitting out in one go what she wanted to say, Origa left without delay.

“Battle, huh?” (Kasha)

There was a small magic tool within the pouch hanging on Kasha’s waist.
Although it was something simple, broken into two pieces and being separated from the other half, it was a quite expensive tool used for the purpose of communication in emergency.
According to the request she had received from Pajou, this half could be used to make Pajou aware of the situation in case Hifumi had been seriously injured or was in a critical state.
For the time being it was something with the purpose of come running in case Hifumi was in danger with the ostensible reason of being able to search for him, but in reality it was obvious that the princess and Pajou intended to assassinate Hifumi in the confusion of the battle.
But, will it be only Hifumi that will die in the situation after using this?
Kasha stared at the door through which Origa left for a long time.

Chapter 39 – Roll On

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Along the road illuminated by the morning sun runs a handcar at neck-breaking speed.
Two soldiers are silently pumping the car down the rail, drenched in sweat.
Since leaving Arosel they have gone non-stop towards Folkalore, and though are much exhausted they do not stop; their duty to their lord motivates them to return even a second sooner.
And upon reaching their destination, the hand car passed beyond the end of the rail, crashing and sending the soldiers into a mountain of straw, which was there to break their fall.
Even so, one of them fainted from the impact, while the other hurried out from the straw.
「Blegh… it's rotten, isn't it」
He said, spitting out straw from his mouth. Soldiers from the gate run up to him,
「Who goes there?!」
「Ah, I am a messenger from the scout division. I can no longer run, so pass my words to Lord Hifumi… Vichy troops have been spotted approaching Rhone. A host of about 13,000 men. 500 of them may be magic casters.」
「So they have come!」
「Alright, I'm heading off to the castle!」
More than tension the soldiers felt exhilaration, and this atmosphere spread through the army. They spoke with the scout for but a brief moment, but had already understood the crux of the report.
The passed out soldier was awoken with a bucket of water, and the soldiers who were otherwise unoccupied went around telling the others the news.
This day began with the lightest mood the soldiers have felt since Vichy began preparing their forces,

Origa knocked on the door to the lord's office, and waited to be permitted to enter.
Upon entering, she saw Hifumi with his legs crossed on the table, pondering something. Kasha was nowhere to be seen.
「You have called for me, how can I be of service?」
「Origa? A messenger reported incoming Vichy force」
「So it's finally time?」
「In the end, they completely ignored the matter with Beirevra」
Origa gently shook her head.
「I am grateful for the concern, but the fault lies with Vichy for stepping on the tiger's tail. The matter of Beirevra can be solved when Vichy is no more」
「Is that so…」
Hifumi said whilst holding onto the paper in his hand.
「What has been on your mind, my lord?」
「Since a while back, I've been told to settle on a formal Family name for my domain. I hadn't thought to do it until the next expedition, though」
He didn't want to think about it, so he used to write "Tohno" on the documents. He wasn't particularly attached to the name, but couldn't think of anything else.
And since then, the region was known as Vagenti's Domain no longer. It was now Tohno's Domain.
「Alright. Just as we planned, have the garrison forces return. Have the prototypes prepared as well」
「Understood. I will pass the order along to Alyssa. I am honored to be allowed to assist you my lord on your path

towards victory」
「That's wrong」
「I apologize. We shall show Hifumi-sama how we wonderfully crush the enemy」 Currently the plan was to empty Rhone, set traps, and decrease the number of enemies that way. Hifumi, however, would move on his own.
Origa saw is inappropriate to allow Hifumi's image to deteriorate because of a loss, and thus rejected this kind of tactic, but because Hifumi himself did not care much for victory, she didn't object too strongly.
After all, he started the war to kill a lot of people; if he won, he would have to plan another battle, and devise schemes to win the next one. Victory itself mattered little to Hifumi.
「I hear that Vichy has invaded!」
The door opened with a bang, and Kasha ran in.
「Yes」
「Why are you so relaxed! We have to prepare」
「Calm down. You have a task you must carry out. There's no use shouting around in our Lord's room. Prepare for Hifumi-sama's departure.」
「Y-yes, but… Origa is also going to fight?」
Kasha's face was dyed in worry, while Origa carried a cool expression.
「What are you saying now? You have your mission, I have mine」
「Hifumi-san, surely you can't possibly let Origa out onto the front lines?!」
Obstinately, Kasha directed the conversation at Hifumi, but his cool response crushed her hopes.
「Not really. She should do as she will. She is not my slave, you see」
「I will fight together with Hifumi-sama」
Seeing that no further words could convince either of them, Kasha's shoulders dropped and,
「… I will make preparations」
She turned around and left.
「Would that be fine?」
「She is a part of the larger play. She's necessary to set the stage as I will it」
Hifumi wore his katana on his hip, and left.
「Kasha is just a fool, after all…」
A whisper that no one could have heard.

By the rail and shuttle one could reach Arosel from Folkare by the following day, and thus in a day the forces were assembled there. This was a speed never before seen in this world.
「How peaceful…」
Though it was cloudy, it was not cold.
Tying the obi of his hakama, Hifumi looked down the road in the direction of Rhone. On one side of the road lay the tracks. Behind Hifumi, in the city of Arosel, the hoi polloi were taking shelter while the soldiers were busily getting ready for war.
By their predictions, the vanguard of the Vichy forces was set to come into view by tomorrow.
「We have finished preparations」
Alyssa stated, having arrived with two soldiers.
The soldiers were on the handcart, choosing the direction it would move in.
「'Tis finally time… Hifumi-san truly does not fear war?」
「It's an opportunity to kill people in broad daylight. Missing it would be a shame」
「You never think that you will be the one to be killed?」
Hifumi answered Alyssa's question while as he got onto the handcart.
「Of course I do. When you kill, it's a privilege to not be killed」
「Huh?」
「Alright, let's go」
The soldiers set the cart into motion upon his order.
The cart accelerated and soon it was out of sight.

「So Hifumi-san also thinks about dying…」
Remembering her own close brush with death, Alyssa tried imaging a mortally wounded Hifumi, but could conjure no such image in her mind.

Rhone, on the border, had no garrison and no traps to welcome the invaders.
The Vichy vanguard were able to relax only after a few hours, and came to use Rhone as a rest area. Probably to attempt to reward their soldiers as much as they could.
As Orsongrande forces never used the houses in Rhone, a thick layer of dust was present in every building, but it was still better than sleeping on grass and stones.
The most unfortunate of the Vichy forces were those who had to stand guard.
And observing these boisterous soldiers who were partaking in a meal, was none other than Hifumi.
Vichy soldiers were shabbily dressed, and outside of the captains and generals giving out orders, none looked like a part of the regular army.
The way they moved showed an attempt at discipline but a complete lack of thereof as well, a truly shabby scene.
Observing this horde and separating them into groups of hundreds and thousands, were the captains and the generals. These men came together and started bickering angrily. The eldest among them, a man with a dark mustache, was clearly in disagreement with the rest.
He was demanding that they immediately attack Orsongrande, while the others were demanding a break, leading to discontent and disagreement between them.
When their “meeting” concluded, each commander went into a different building.
(They are probably planning on rearranging the troops after they all have gathered in the city)
Gliding into the shadows created by buildings, Hifumi slept there until it was dark.

Upon hearing that Vichy troops were advancing, an individual took the fastest horse to Orsongrande Castle.
「…Pajo, as expected」
「Ay!」
Upon learning of the news Imeraria called Pajo and ordered her dispatch reinforcements to Folkalore, as they have previously schemed.
When Pajo had left, Imeraria called in the Prime Minister. He, too, knew of her intentions.
「Imeraria-sama… are you certain this is what you wish for?」
「I have made up my mind. Pajo, too, is satisfied… Yes, it is my fault that Hifumi-sama was brought into this world and subjected to unpleasant happenings」
Imeraria’s gaze was towards Folkalore.
「That, however, does not give him a right to trample on this world. I can’t say I am not motivated by a personal grudge, though… Had he fought the beast-men there may have been use of him, but fighting fellow humans is unforgivable」
「Imeraria-sama…」
「’Tis an underhanded trick, but should Hifumi-sama overcome the predicament before him, should he be such an aberrant of a man, then no one under the heavens could stop him. But I have been told Vichy forces number more than ten thousand. Victory with a handful of men is impossible.」
And as her tears spilled out,
「I am powerless. I can’t even strike down my father’s foe without resorting to cheap tricks. Should I fail I too will die. When that happens, please take care of my brother」
The Prime Minister, without saying anything, bowed and left.

Night had fallen on the city of Rhone shrouding it in darkness and silence.
Some still stood around campfires, their sleepy faces illuminated by its light.
(I guess it’s time)
Hifumi slipped out from his hiding spot and traveled from shadow to shadow.
His targeted the buildings he demarcated as belonging to commanders.
He approached the first building and tried the lock on the wooden door—it was unlocked so he went in.

There were five people inside the house. One in each room, sleeping.
He entered a room and slit the throat of a sleeping enemy.
Then to the next, and the next, murdering as he went.
(Yup, yup, next, next)
Hifumi then moved to the next housing, dispatching of the men he remembered seeing that day and any who were in the house.
Some were embracing a woman, so he skewered both of them.
(Wasn't there a movie with a similar plot?)
Hifumi was not a fan of horror, so he didn't remember the movie all too well.
Picking methods that would dispose of his enemies quickly, Hifumi felt like he was being a kind person to them.
But he did indeed pick methods like cutting the carotid artery, decapitating, stabbing in the heart, stabbing the brain, cutting a body in half—methods were such that a sleeping person could not react.
Within two hours he had planned to dispose of every commander. Not a single had learned of Hifumi's presence, nor put up any resistance, causing Hifumi to quickly grow bored. He desperately hoped that some would counterattack, but all disappointed.
He also saw food, but found it boring to kill starving enemies, so decided not to tamper with it.
At last he entered the building where the mustache-commander was.
The mustache-geezer was soundly snoring in his room.
After observing his sleeping face, Hifumi took out not his katana, but a quill and wrote.

Buer, the man feared as the strictest general, awoke with the phrase『Noisy Bastard』written on his forehead. Buer was known as the strongest, most violent general, and his anger was likewise famous.
Thus when he saw the phrase written on his forehead he exploded in anger.
Yet even that anger was incomparable to his rage when he heard that every other commander was killed.
「Such cowardly tricks! And why leave me alive?!」
His poor chamberlain could only remain silent through his anger.
「Is he saying that I'm not a threat?! That my presence wouldn't change anything?!」
Hifumi was kind enough upon leaving Rhone to show himself to a patrolling soldier and then knock him out. This way he meant to convey that the slaughter was carried out by someone from the outside. Buer, of course, figured that Orsongrande must have done it.
In his anger, Buer forced the soldiers to immediately prepare for a forced march toward Folkalore.
A few soldiers were so afraid of the sudden demise of their commanders that they fled.
Buer berated these individuals, threatening them with the greatest of punishment, and failed to consider his troops when forcing the march.
「Orsongrande bastards! I will reach your gates and end you! Just come before me!」
The soldiers drowning in his constant litany of anger and hatred, were marching towards Folkalore even more exhausted than they were yesterday.

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Chapter 40 – Come To Me

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Before dawn Hifumi, who came back with the soldiers using the rail car from Rhone to Arosel, told Origa, who had been waiting for him, to advance at once as planned and fell asleep.
In the time the feudal lord was sleeping, Alyssa, commanding the Toono territorial army, was busy preparing with the goal of executing the next military operation.
A part of the soldiers helped the common city residents to load their belongings on numerous carriages and to migrate to farm villages to the side of the highway leading to Fokalore.
As the move was something Hifumi had ordered, Origa was deeply moved emotionally, Kasha was full of doubts, and Alyssa agreed without having heard the reason.

“They will be a hindrance if they loiter around. If a number of them is swallowed up by the battle, the tax yields will decrease.” (Hifumi)

With Hifumi stating this as reason, Origa was impressed, Kasha was able to consent, and Alyssa grasped it by saying “I guess if that’s what Hifumi says, then it has to be correct.”
Although it was partly a forced migration, with even the soldiers having an easygoing mood and having explained to the residents that it was inevitable due to the war, the move steadily made progress.
Facing the residents, Alyssa said 「You will be able to come back the day after tomorrow.」 While they were only half-convinced by such words, the residents came to grips with it thinking *Such a child has enough composure to try calming us down, huh?*
The portion of soldiers, who stayed up all night to prepare for the battle, were still within their dreams.
The soldiers, continuing by taking shifts, lined up several vehicles on each of the two rail tracks and installed spear throwers on the rear wagon of the rail cars.
The wagons before those were used to transport the reserve spears while at the same time acting as driving force.

“Do you understand the strategy?” (Origa)

“Etto, once the enemy approaches a visible location, escape with the rail cars while attacking with the spears throwers. As much as possible ambush and snipe at the troublesome magic soldiers. Once we arrive at Fokalore, we close the gate and once again attack with the spear throwers.” (Alyssa)

“Did I get it right?” as Alyssa looked up to the face of the only slightly taller Origa, she was gently smiling.

“Yes, there seems to be no problem. Well then, after I go to join up with Hifumi-sama, please take care of the remaining preparations.” (Origa)

“Roger!” (Alyssa)

Kasha smiled bitterly following Alyssa, who ran off at a fast pace, with her sight until she was out of view while murmuring,

“Somehow there isn’t the mood as if it was before a war.” (Kasha)

“Although one might say that we are inferior to them, it is just a ‘handicap.’ There should be a considerable number of reinforcements from the capital arriving at the time we return to Fokalore. At last, the course of events will lead to nothing but the Vichy army withdrawing after having their numbers diminished.” (Origa)

“I will put my trust into them.” (Kasha)

She didn’t say into whom though.

“That’s only natural.” (Origa)

As Origa started to walk with a displeased snort, Kasha continued to display an expression full of mixed feelings.
(Handicap, huh? If nothing is done, my time to talk with Origa will disappear, but …) (Kasha)
Up until this day, today, the chances for Kasha to speak with Origa had increased little by little.
Although Origa still displayed the same cold attitude towards her, it wasn’t like she completely ignored her.
At the current rate they might return to their original relationship slowly. She also held onto the fleeting hope of them both possibly going back to their free adventuring days once again someday.

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Around the time all preparations were in order, the ground shook with the sounds of feet from people and hooves from horses coming from the direction of Rhone.

“They are coming!”

The soldiers of the territorial army standing watch at the exit towards Rhone warned their allies of the nearing enemy by waving a flag.
As they confirmed the sign of comprehension by their colleagues on top of the gate towards Fokalore, the soldiers on watch withdrew at full speed.
They were told to escort the evacuees on their move to the farm villages.
As a matter of fact there was absolutely no motivation for them to risk their lives in the war.
Because crossing swords with the enemy was the Lord’s duty and enjoyment, they wouldn’t be forgiven if they stole that opportunity.
Around the time when the soldiers on watch left the city with such an excuse, Hifumi waited for the enemy in a daunting pose between two rail cars with installed spear throwers.
In his hand he held the kusarigama. *(T/N: sickle and chain weapon)*
The hem of the hakama was tied by using a simple string. The katana hung at his waist.
While he was bored and thus swung the counterweights on both sides around, the soldiers, who had boarded the rail cars, set up the spear throwers and waited impatiently and nervously.
The Vichy army plunging forward had to drop the speed within the uninhabited city. As they discovered Hifumi’s figure, the order to halt was given.
At this point of time, the Vichy army had decreased to an amount of around 9000 due to the people, who ran away from the damage in Rhone, and those who went to round up the evacuating masses affiliated with the city in one place.
This matter had become yet another fuel to fan the flames of Buer’s anger.
Being the vanguard, Buer, wearing an armored helmet, straddled his splendid horse and glared at Hifumi.

“What is it youngster? Don’t be a nuisance. Get away from there!” (Buer)

After merely saying two words, during the third word, Buer’s fury erupted.
The last words were shouted in anger.
Hifumi, who was grinning broadly and laughing, straightened his back and performed a beautiful bow.

“I am honoured to meet you for the first time. I am a viscount of Orsongrande governing the territory of Toono, my

name is Hifumi.” (Hifumi)

“You said Hifumi? It’s you bastard, huh?!” (Buer)

“Oya, for some reason it seems my name has become famous even over there in Vichy.” (Hifumi)

Looking over his shoulders, Origa returned a 「That’s only natural!」 on top of the rail car.
The members of the territorial armed forces laughed.

“What’s so funny!” (Buer)

Even as Buer shouted in a thundering voice, Hifumi’s smile didn’t falter.

“Before the war I instructed all of them ‘I’ve put an easily recognizable mark on the forehead of the enemy’s supreme commander.'” (Hifumi)

Due to Hifumi’s words, the chamberlains on both sides of Buer made a face displaying 「Oh no!」
The next moment Buer raised a roar.

“I-It was youu~!” (Buer)

Within a second Buer let the anger guide him and dashed forward with his horse. Hifumi lightly hit the tip of the horse’s nose by throwing the counterweight.
While holding down the horse, which acted violently due to the surprise, the rail cars started to move. Hifumi leisurely jumped on top of it and the speed increased.

“After them! Don’t let them escape!” (Buer)

Upon Buer’s instruction the group of horse-riders in the vanguard, including the chamberlains, spurred their horses into gallop. But they were pierced by spears, regardless whether it was soldier or horse, one by one, within a moment.

“Raise the speed after properly hitting them. We will have them run for a while.” (Hifumi)

Origa and Alyssa conveyed the instructions of Hifumi, who was sitting on top the rail cars, to the soldiers sequentially.
Urged on by the voice of Buer telling those, who were stumbling, falling over or such, to avoid the fallen soldiers or even tread on them, but no matter what to chase them, Vichy’s soldiers frantically advanced forward.
There was a lot of cavalry in the vanguard troops. Even with Buer running wildly without concerning himself with those trailing behind, the distance spread steadily.
Lured by the group that was eagerly pursuing at the front, the entire army of Vichy started to advance by running fast. At the time the end of the line left the city of Arosel, they were assaulted by a large quantity of spears hurled at them from both sides of the highway.
There was no one left to put the soldiers in order as the rear group fell into chaos due to the unforeseen surprise attack. One by one they abandoned their pierced comrades and scattered in all directions trying to to escape.
At the time the spear attacks, which concentrated their aim on the magic soldiers gathered in the last division, ceased, the magic soldiers were almost completely annihilated. In the end, of the Vichy army, around 2000 cavalary went ahead, around 5000 infantry alongside the archers chased after them while being separated and the survivors of the rear scurried home.
The territorial soldiers lurking close to the highway in order to ambush the enemy, after letting the troops from Vichy, who were chasing after Hifumi’s group, pass, they cleared away the corpses and dealt with the surviving enemy soldiers. From thereon the last remaining task was for them to meet up with the citizens taking refuge in the farm villages.

“Who was the clumsy fellow, who hurled the spear until the opposite side of here?”

“100 people were done in.”

“I skewered 3 people or something like that all at once!”

In the faces of the soldiers, who were clearing away the corpses by using their hands while severally talking, there wasn’t any fear of losing nor any tragic feeling about the war.

“Now that it’s done, let’s go to the village. I think we can let the Lord deal with the rest.”

Everyone agreed on the spot and began to walk without even forming a line.

“Even though it would be nice if the rails were even laid out in the direction of the village.”

For them it was a feeling of the war having already ended.

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“We will soon pass the aforementioned place.” (Origa)

Hifumi only nodded to Origa’s report.
The mass of Vichy soldiers pursuing in the back were completely separated from the cavalry group following.
On top of the rail car which was shaking and rattling, Hifumi was sitting cross-legged having turned his back to the direction of movement staring at them with a fleeting glance.

“Wait! Fight me fair and square! I will kill you!” (Buer)

Besides Buer, who was chasing after them while shouting energetically on top of the horseback, the other Vichy forces didn’t appear to have notice what was awaiting them.
Although the number of Vichy’s cavalry had decreased fast due to the intermittent firing of spears, they deliberately didn’t aim at Buer.
Ascertaining the deployment of the enemy, Hifumi gave directions on the attacks. Then he noticed them passing through the scheduled location.

“Full speed ahead.” (Hifumi)

Origa didn’t miss Hifumi’s brief instruction.

“All members, go forward with full power!” (Origa)

With Origa’s command, the soldiers, holding the handle of the rail car, raised their voices and poured all their strength into it.

“Despite me being the military affairs director …” (Alyssa)

“This is because you didn’t listen to Hifumi-sama’s words.” (Origa)

At the time the Vichy cavalry focused their eyes on the sped-up rail cars, it was one of the chamberlains galloping next to Buer, who fell for the first trap.
The horse’s forefeet tread though the ground of the highway.
It was a small and shallow pitfall, but the horse, missing its footing, quickly fell over.
In succession Vichy soldiers following tumbled and were stepped on.
Even though Buer eased up the speed of the rushing horse and ordered the following soldiers to get off the highway, pitfalls, almost indistinguishable from the grass, were prepared there as well.

For a while Buer continued the pursuit, but at last he fell off the horse as it collapsed.
Since Hifumi also saw him trying to get up, Buer was apparently safe one way or the other.

“I will wait for you in Fokalore!” (Hifumi)

Although his enemy tried to retort something to Hifumi’s call, the rail car was already in a far distance at that time moving away from that location.

“You may lower the speed. We will wait for the enemy at Fokalore afterwards.” (Hifumi)

There still remained many archers and infantry within the Vichy army at this time, but the horses were pretty much wasted.
Buer decided to take a temporary rest waiting for those following, but losing his temper due to the lessened number of soldiers gathered, he found fault with everybody in the vicinity.
Frankly speaking, their large military force was kicked around by a few Orsongrande soldiers. He had expected to grandly march towards Fokalore about now.
After crossing the national border, Orsongrande had arbitrarily established at Rhone, and advancing into this direction, just about everything was rubbing Buer’s nerves the wrong way.

“Without fighting directly, it is just surprise attacks, traps and escaping … To what extent do you plan to make fun of me! Only that youngster, I will definitely kill myself!” (Buer)

While Buer was getting worked up, even at that time, those, sensing the impeding crisis after the magic soldiers disappeared and the horses were lost, broke away one by one and deserted.
Buer got even more enraged about this matter.
As it was now, he would have to return to his country without earning any accomplishments. Generals, who escaped without being able to gather their allies and to decently fight without accidents, never reappeared on the public stage a second time.
It wasn’t unlikely for them to get stuck with spending the rest of their life in a defense unit in a remote farm village.
As far as Buer was concerned, he held a pride of having build up his status by successive victories and his military power, although he never had the chance to participate in a large battle. It was unthinkable for him to do something like retreating without doing anything as long as he was able to fight.
Taking a hurried meal and resting for about an hour, they now advanced orderly.

“We will conquer Fokalore before the enemy’s reinforcements arrive! Start marching!” (Buer)

While the soldiers were sometimes irritated by having their feet sink into the small pitfalls, Buer borrowed a horse from another person. His face was red while burning with the desire for revenge.

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Pajou’s Third Knight Unit led the reinforcements. Quickly finishing the formation of the troops, it was almost as if they were laying in wait. In the early morning 3000 soldiers departed from the royal castle.
The soldiers, heading out for the sake of rescuing the hero from his crisis, were passionately cheered on by the populace.
Although the soldiers, who didn’t find it strange, were joyfully listening to the shouts of joy while advancing forward by walking, all of the Third Knight Unit, leading the troops while riding on horses, erased their facial expressions.
They were given a contradictory mission called ‘if it goes as planned, you will have to fight that man.’ Thus they couldn’t even show something like a smiling face.
As a result of her close relationship to Hifumi, Pajou was elected as leader of the current reinforcements.
Leading the advance, Pajou’s expression was stiff, too.

“Let’s hurry up a bit.” (Pajou)

“If we rush too much, we will leave the soldiers behind. In the first place, it is unthinkable for Fokalore, which has a firm defense being close to the border, to fall easily. Don’t get too impatient.” (Midas)

Towards the voice of Midas, who was moving right behind her, Pajou sighed with a forced smile on her face. She didn’t want to be seen as pathetic in Midas’ eyes.

“Rather than having to show such a face, it would have been fine to not propose such a plan, I think.” (Midas)

“Saying this now? This is also for the sake of Imeraria’s revenge. It is a strategy to stop having this country being dragged into the quagmire of war.” (Pajou)

“Since you understand, get a bit more relaxed. You will end up being worn out before we arrive at Fokalore.” (Midas)

“… Oh well” (Pajou)

Easing up just slightly on the speed, Pajou faced towards the front again and was silent.
While watching that back wearing an armor, Midas felt that he couldn’t foresee where this battle was headed to.
In fact Sabnak had refused the invitation to join the reinforcements.
Even though he had promised to keep the secret, he couldn’t agree to the reason for the hostility against Hifumi no matter what.
I guess, since he is still young, he only sees that dazzling heroic appearance of Hifumi rather than him being someone holding a protruding strength. But even with such an excuse, he still isn’t quite able to comprehend the real intention himself either.
Being young, he is manipulated by a perilous sense of justice due to looking at that radiant appearance. Though I wonder if it isn’t only Sabnak but also Pajou and Princess Imeraria being affected by this?
Although Hifumi certainly killed the king, it doesn’t mean that it wasn’t the king’s fault either.
He caused this country to go to war, but as a result he brought gains.
To be honest, rather than anyone, it is certainly Sabnak, who made a calm and accurate judgement, I guess?
Aren’t we walking ahead into the direction of danger without being able to avert our eyes from such strong words called ‘War’ and ‘King Slayer’?
(I should have tried to talk a bit more with Sabnak …) (Midas)
Personally I don’t hate Hifumi.
But I also believe to understand his danger.
In a state of murky hesitation, Midas headed towards the battlefield alongside the other knights.

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Hifumi was waiting at Fokalore.
Staring at the view of the drawn katana, his heart was leaping in anticipation.

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Chapter 41 – Nobody's Listening

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Just before noon the Vichy army slowly approached the stage of the battle, Fokalore, in a large spread out formation.
Buer, placed at the center of the the troops mounted on a horse, glared at the tightly closed gate of Fokalore.
The gate of Fokalore was an enormous and massive iron wall.
Pruflas had constructed it following Hifumi's instructions.
The wall enclosed the city as well and the side facing Vichy was predominantly reinforced. It was elevated to a height of close to 3 meters in contrast to the traditional height of 2 meters.

"Get ready." (Buer)

Without averting his gaze, Buer ordered.
As the command was transmitted between his subordinates, the infantry came out one by one in front of Buer and lined up.
The foundation of assaulting a city in this world was to either strike at the gate using a great number of people or to forcibly open it. As for the soldiers not fitting in front of the gate, they were to climb over the wall. It was such an extremely simply strategy.
Although quite a number of soldiers had deserted, Buer judged that they had an ample amount of war potential to conquer the city before the enemy reinforcements would come. Without using any originality he chose a plan of passing over the high wall and forcibly breaking through the gate by a human waves tactic in order to tear down the defense.

"Atta-" (Buer)

Before Buer could finish voicing out his order, the gate, made by Pruflas using special metals, slowly opened.

"Humph, being aware of the unfavorable numbers, they decided to surrender, huh?" (Buer)

But, it wasn't a messenger of capitulation that appeared from within the gate. It was something as big in size as 3 of those spear throwers that had killed many of the Vichy soldiers.
When the huge spear thrower's spears protruded from the gap of the gate, it ceased the opening movement.
It was completely charged with thick spears which didn't allow any objections to be branded as logs.
The discharge of the spears made a deep sound of *gon*. The spears approached the soldiers of Vichy drawing a radiating line rather than a straight line. They stole the lives of several soldiers not by piercing but by smashing them.

"Wh-, Wh- …" (Buer)

With the appearance of the never-before-seen huge weapon, Buer even forgot to issue any orders as he watched a log smeared with red blood roll next to him.
Using that opportunity, the spear thrower was pulled back into the city and the gate once again closed its maw.

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“What is that …” (Kasha)

Looking at the blunt weapons flying in the sky, Kasha, just like Buer, became speechless.
At her side Hifumi and Pruflas were reviewing the results.

“It might be too heavy after all?” (Hifumi)

“No matter how you look at it, there is a limit to it, no?” (Pruflas)

Watching the logs just barely reaching the enemy without even any decent velocity, those two had their attention drawn to the problematic issues rather than the things working out and easy-goingly discussed them.
As the dwarves proposed “It is currently, so to speak, a trial product, but won’t it still be quite powerful?” it resulted in Hifumi granting permission by saying 「Why don’t you try making it then?」

“It is a failure. Just put it away into an empty storage house afterwards.” (Hifumi)

“I guess it can’t be helped. I will try to improve it once I have some time.” (Pruflas)

Unaware of Buer’s amazement, Hifumi and Pruflas judged it as failure.
While the dwarves in high spirits were indulged in severally discussing their opinions where it was lacking and what they failed to calculate in, they retreated from the front-lines together with the huge spear thrower which was affixed with ropes.
As if replacing them, Alyssa came running to Hifumi’s side.

“Hifumi-san, as you have declared, the citizens are taking refuge for the moment, but is that place really alright?” (Alyssa)

“It’s fine. Leaving that aside, since the playtime for the dwarves has ended, I leave the rest to you.” (Hifumi)

“Understood! Hifumi-san, please take care as well!” (Alyssa)

Alyssa issued the next orders to the soldiers while running around.
Three iron bolts were securing the closed gate.
It would be impossible to destroy the gate as long as they didn’t use quite an impressive battering ram.
The inner part of the tall wall was equipped with a scaffolding. On the upper and lower tiers there were loopholes turned into sniping outlets for the javelin devices.
Each spear thrower was handled by two soldiers. They were guided to take a rest by shift at the intervals of 30 minutes.
The system enabled them to keep up barraging the attackers with a constant attack pattern of 50 spears per wave day and night.
Hifumi carried out the finishing touches himself. *(T/N: That’s one very nasty defense setup xD)*

“Welcome to Fokalore!” (Hifumi)

Hifumi, who had climbed to the top of the gate, gathered the attention with a *pan pan*.

“To you, who came from distant lands, we have arranged a grandiose reception. Looking at you like this, I praise you for your splendid perseverance coming here. Please savor the banquet plentifully.” (Hifumi)

“Open the gate and come out! Fight fair and square!” (Buer)

Although Buer’s throat only got hoarse by replying to Hifumi’s words in a voice filled with anger, Hifumi ended up withdrawing quickly in the middle of Buer’s continuing speech.
As Buer’s voice raised hell on the other side of the gate, whether the soldiers of the Vichy army likewise got fired up

in fury or were frightened by Buer's appearance, either way, as for the inside of the gate, no one lent an ear to the words of the enemy general.
All of the soldiers of the Toono territorial army knew of the battlefields up until now and what would take place from hereon. *Although it would have been fine to flee, coming up to here being spurred on by Hifumi's provocations was a mistake,* all of them thought indifferently, as if it was somebody's else's problem.
Not swords and clubs, but repeatedly attacking them by surprise attacks with the long-distance arms they were provided with, for the territorial army a complete victory was the given. For them this war was nothing else but a one-sided, bloody, straight obliteration of their enemies.

"Don't kill the general." (Hifumi)

"Alright, I will tell everyone properly to not do so." (Alyssa)

"Well then, I leave the command to you." (Hifumi)

"Roger! Everyone, begin the attack!" (Alyssa)

Following Alyssa's order, spears were shot successively.
With the steady downpour of spears, the soldiers of the Vichy army were pierced and a mass of corpses was produced.
Some saw their companions right in front of their eyes meeting instant death.
Some fainted in agony as a spear impaled them from the abdomen.
Although Buer, who was spared from being aimed at following Hifumi's order, hurriedly gave the order to attack, those, trying to break into a run, were felled with aimed hits.
Furthermore, many of those, who turned their back on the dread, became prey of the spears.
Even though there were also those who hid themselves in-between their companions corpses, it was easy for the spears, having their power and force repeatedly improved by the dwarves, to penetrate through a man's body crushing its bones.
The Vichy army, even despite its numbers, was forcibly pushed back and slowly had to distance itself.

"Forward! Forward! Keep up the pressure! We will win once we get hold of the gate!" (Buer)

Not thinking of having any doubts of himself not being targeted, Buer brandished his sword as he shouted.
While stepping over their companions being shot one by one, the Vichy soldiers coming out in front clung to the gate as soon as possible by all means struggling to escape this hell domain.
From the highway, scattered with corpses and severely wounded, the archers tried to provide cover with their arrows for the infantry, which departed before them.
In order to not disobey Buer's order they sporadically shot arrows, but being thwarted by the the high walls, there wasn't any visible effect.

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Around two hours had passed since the start of the battle. Pressured by the one-sided slaughter, the number of Vichy soldier's had considerably dropped. And yet they still struggled to arrive in front of the gate while covered in injuries. For the sake of avenging their allies, they battered with force at the gate using the swords and clubs they held in their hands.
While a sound of *gon gon*'s reverberated with multiple shifted tempos, Hifumi frowned.

"How noisy… it would have been better to install some cushioning materials on the gate, I guess?" (Hifumi)

Next to him, Kasha was plugging her ears.
Although she had been placed next to Hifumi as guard during the battle, she was bored as there wasn't even any work to do for her.

Going by Hifumi's well-known strategy, the Vichy's army would eventually retreat as they were unilaterally massacred as it was now.
In that case she wouldn't have a chance to use the communication magic tool she had been entrusted by Pajou.
Even though I had steeled my resolve while having severe hesitation, wouldn't it be better if that operation wasn't executed? was what Kasha thought as well.

"Hifumi-sama" (Origa)

Origa, who had commanded the soldiers at the Lord's mansion while he was absent, approached.

"It seems that the reinforcements of the royal castle will arrive before long. According to the scout's report, it appears the Third Knight Unit is leading the reinforcements." (Origa)

"I see." (Hifumi)

"Scouts? Did you dispatch scouts into the direction of the royal castle as well?" (Kasha)

Following Origa's words, Kasha ended up unconsciously raising her voice.

"Ah, our movements here may likewise have to change depending on the timing of the reinforcements' arrival… Is it somehow inconvenient if we dispatch our scouts into that direction?" (Hifumi)

"N-No, it is fine to go that far if it's for knowing the situation of our allies… No, don't worry about it." (Kasha)

Glancing at the flustered Kasha, Hifumi faced towards the vicinity of the gate.

"I will go kill the guys clinging to the gate." (Hifumi)

Climbing the scaffolding, he ascended to the top of the gate once again.
Although Origa tried to stop him by warning him of the dangers, Hifumi rebuked her by saying "It will be the end if the enemy manages to break through the gate here by some chance, thus I will go help out a bit" and continued his climbing to the top of the gate subsequently.
Kasha also tried to follow him, but since it was originally impossible for people to climb there. Hifumi ordered her to wait on standby as it would be too narrow for three people up there either way.
As Hifumi looked down from atop the gate, he saw about 10 Vichy soldiers desperately striking the gate without even causing small vibrations to it.

"Shut up." (Hifumi)

Hifumi withdrew a naginata from his dark magic storage and brushed the carotid artery with it precisely and gently.
With the raising spray of blood the gate was painted in red.
Origa also undauntedly used her wind magic, she had trained hard, for cutting off the legs and arms of the Vichy soldiers. One by one the men were plunged into the abyss of death.
Origa was excited by the euphoria of battle fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with Hifumi for the first time in a while. She released magic at the arrows, descending on a dangerous spot, from the Vichy forces.
Having shortened the thoroughly repeated chants to the limit, the wind blades reaped the enemy's lives continuously in succession.
For the first time it had become a genuine defensive battle. There was also the significance of appealing to Hifumi who was standing right next to her. Being in ecstasy while slaughtering the Vichy soldiers below her, she saw an arrow following the course of certainly hitting her at the time she incidentally raised her face, but Origa didn't react in any way.
In an instant, feeling as if time itself had slowed down, a shadow wedged itself into her field of vision covering her body.

When a *don* resounded, Origa was surprised by the muffled sound of an arrow hitting a human body and her thoughts turned blank. *(T/N: author wrote "turned into the direction of day after tomorrow" here, but I guess that makes no sense, so changed it)*
At the time she fell down from the top of the gate, she came to her senses by the pain.

"Painful … arrow? Who is … ah, ah, ahhh …" (Origa)

Something like who would have been able to protect her from the arrow flying at her at that timing, there wasn't even any necessity to think calmly about it. She couldn't settle down catching sight of that figure.

"Hi-Hifumi-sama!" (Origa)

Having an arrow stuck in his shoulder, Hifumi had even further protected Origa from the fall. While breathing roughly he had collapsed on the city's ground drenched in sweat.
Everyone then and there was surprised witnessing that sight.
Of course, even Kasha wasn't an exception.

"Hifumi-san!" (Kasha)

"Kasha-san, leave this place to me. Take Hifumi-san to the mansion for medical treatment! Since Origa-san has fallen down as well, go together to the mansion!" (Alyssa)

Towards the two flustered women, Alyssa, the youngest of them, called out. She also issued an order to the soldiers to keep composure and continue the shooting.

"Th-That's right, if we don't hurry with the medical treatment …" (Kasha)

Although she pondered whether this might possibly be her chance to get in touch with Pajou, with only one arrow having struck him and Hifumi possessing high-ranking healing medicine, Alyssa would naturally have considered the time for medical treatment.
Kasha summoned two soldiers and gave them the instruction to remove a door of a nearby house and carry Hifumi on top of it. She herself lent her shoulder to Origa.
There was no serious injury visible on Origa, but her ankle was badly twisted and it didn't seem like she would be able to normally stand.
Even though the front line, having seen off the two leaders, fell into confusion temporarily, they were propped up by Alyssa's extremely unsuited fiery encouragement.

"Hey there! Aim properly while shooting!" (Alyssa)

"U-Understood!"

The territorial soldier, having his back clapped, suppressed his impatience and aimed at the next enemy.
The soldiers, who took their rest in turns, were astonished by the stoutheartedness of Alyssa.

"The chief is calm for sure."

"After all, that was Hifumi just acting." (Alyssa)

Though it was different for Origa, Alyssa said.

"… ha?"

"Hifumi-san had been looking for a chance to pretend getting injured. Since he withdrew to the mansion after actually getting injured… ah!" (Alyssa)

Incidentally having exposed something outrageous, Alyssa began to panic.

“Fo-Forget what I’ve said! I was told to aim for the enemy general once Hifumi became injured! Aim at that guy and quickly kill him off! After hitting him, cease shooting for a short while!” (Alyssa)

“U-Understood!”

Buer, not having been aimed at the whole duration of the battle, exposed his figure boldly while giving commands on top of his horse.
That place was pierced almost simultaneously by several spears. Buer died without even understanding what had happened to him.
The Vichy soldiers, seeing their general shaking violently and dropping from his horse as well as losing the audible voice forcing them to persist in this dangerous place, noticed that the downpour of spears had ceased.
And then, as there wasn’t any commander left any more, the soldiers chose to retreat rather than attack.
Even those soldiers clustered in front of the gate, watching their allies in the rear fleeing, escaped from the gate at full speed.

“Well then, open the gate! Half of you will accompany me to drive the enemies away until the national border! The remaining half will clear the area in front of the gate!” (Alyssa)

Other than Alyssa’s orders the territorial soldiers couldn’t follow on how easily the battle had ended. But as Alyssa told them that it wouldn’t work out if they didn’t purge the enemy before the residents returned to the city, they started to move without complaining within a tight schedule.

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The Vichy’s side residents were temporarily moved to the plaza in front of the mansion. But none of those residents were told that the Vichy army had been repelled.
Because they approached that place carrying the injured Lord, the area around of the mansion became noisy. With the notification of the arrival of the reinforcements brought about by pressing for answers, great cheers were raised.
Pajou’s group was bewildered by the strange welcoming mood, but just before she could step into the city, she became aware of the breaking sound of the portable magic tool. Her face became stiff.
It was a notice from Kasha about Hifumi’s dangerous state.
Entering the city, she confirmed the matter about Hifumi’s injury with several of the fief’s population. Judging that Hifumi had received a serious injury, she led two thirds of the unit towards the mansion whereas Midas took command of the remaining third.

“Please advance into the direction of Vichy.” (Pajou)

“… Roger.” (Midas)

Pushing her way through the populace, she saw off Midas galloping away on a horse towards the gate facing into Vichy’s direction. Pajou turned towards the Knight Unit and told them to dismount their horses and draw their swords. She gave the soldiers the order to surround the mansion for the sake of hindering the populace to enter the mansion.
Although she felt anxious as things were going a tad too well, missing the opportunity due to being seized by fear was unacceptable she persuaded herself. Together with her comrades she broke into the Lord’s mansion where Hifumi was supposed to be.

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Chapter 42 – LIAR

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Seeing Hifumi being carried into the mansion, the lone civil official slave Caim raised his eyebrows for a mere instant.

“Caim-san! Hifumi-sama is injured!” (Origa)

In contrast with the shaken up Origa, Caim, maintaining his usual prudence without any change, shook his head.

“Please calm down, Origa-sama … it isn’t very desirable for many people to know of this situation. Please enter the office together with Lord-sama. I shall be in charge of bringing the medical tools.” (Caim)

No sooner than saying so, Caim straightened up his back and disappeared in an inner room.

“Ah, Hifumi-sama … because of me …” (Origa)

“Origa, get a grip!” (Kasha)

She encouraged Origa, who had been completely haggard for these few minutes. The two soldiers somehow managed to lay down Hifumi on the sofa in that office.
Kasha told the soldiers, who carried Hifumi, to entrust this place to her and head back to the front lines.
As Hifumi had been gently put to lay upside-down so as to not touch the arrow embedded in his shoulder, Origa was sitting on the floor clinging to Hifumi.

“I am very sorry, just because I ended up getting carried away …” (Origa)

As Origa, sobbing sorrowfully, hit the bottom of grief and anxiety, she experienced a welling up of happiness due to Hifumi protecting her. Becoming disgusted at herself because of that, she cried once again.

“Origa …” (Kasha)

In the time waiting for Caim, Kasha worried about Origa while also keeping a watchful eye on Hifumi’s condition. While walking restlessly, she touched the magic tool on top of the pouch at her waist.

“… Origa, this is …” (Hifumi)

Distorted by pain, Hifumi opened his eyes. From within the darkness storage he took out those magic potion bottles that had saved Alyssa on the verge of death.
As expected, he has those, huh? Kasha thought. Although she unconsciously showed a bitter face, neither Hifumi nor Origa were in any state to notice that.
The existence of the medicine caused Origa to be very delighted once it reached her mind. She showed a smile as if she had forgotten something like the pain caused by her foot.

“Right away, I will open the bottle immediately!” (Origa)

Getting irritated at the small wooden cork while telling herself to calm down, she uncorked the bottle at last. Timidly pouring just a little on the wound on Hifumi's shoulder, Origa clutched the arrow tightly.

"I will draw out the arrow." (Origa)

So as to not unnecessarily widen the wound, Origa drew it out cautiously. Apparently it had penetrated quite deeply. She pulled out the arrow with a sound of *zuru zuru*. It was soaked and dripping in blood from the arrowhead 15 cm downwards along the shaft.
Tossing the arrow away, she hurriedly sprinkled the magic potion over the wound.

"Why? … For what reason?" (Origa)

Despite having already used up most of the bottle's contents, there wasn't any visible sign of the wound on Hifumi's shoulder being healed.

"Kasha! Even though I am using the magic potion, the wound isn't getting cured!" (Origa)

"No way …" (Kasha)

By now Hifumi's consciousness had become faint as the bleeding increased at the part the arrow was extracted. Origa, who couldn't touch the wound carelessly either, sank down to the floor with despair written in her face.
The bottle, dropping from her hand, tumbled across the floor.
Without even knocking, the civil official slave Doelgar entered the room and approached Hifumi with heavy steps holding bandages.
Squatting down before Hifumi, he looked at the sideways laying arrow.

"It had penetrated that deep inside? … This might be dangerous …" (Doelgar)

Although he had probably muttered this without the intention of anyone hearing it, it ended up entering Origa's ears.

"Dangerous you say!? The magic healing potion doesn't work, we have to apply other medicines …" (Origa)

"P-Please settle down. It is rare for the magic healing potion to not work, but I have heard of such occurrences. It was caused by some special constitution. There were even cases where its effectiveness had become weak and even had the opposite effect." (Doelgar)

As Origa was emitting a threatening force as if snarling at him, Doelgar explained what he remembered.

"Special … constitution …" (Kasha)

Now that he mentions it, Hifumi was summoned, "a person coming from another world," Kasha recalled.
There hasn't been a time when she had seen Hifumi getting injured before. Let alone a magic potion, she hasn't seen him even using a regular ointment.
(If that's the case …) (Kasha)
As she told him to stop the bleeding at the very least, Kasha propped up Origa who had turned into a lifeless doll. She took Origa to her own office next door since they would just become a hindrance in the treatment.

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When Kasha's group left, Hifumi muttered after calming his breath,

"Doelgar, you are unexpectedly skilful at acting." (Hifumi)

"Not as great as Lord-sama. When I heard you came back with an arrow sticking inside you, I was seriously worried." (Doelgar)

Abruptly rising, Hifumi took out a heater pack magic tool from within his breast pocket and discarded it on the floor.
The sweat wasn't due to it being cold sweat but merely because of the heat. Due to the magic tool producing more heat than he had imagined, it apparently didn't end with getting sweaty but even scalded him.
Having wiped off the sweat, Hifumi took out a magic potion bottle from his storage and roughly poured it on his shoulder.
The wound closed itself quickly.

"Quite the handy thing." (Hifumi)

Shifting his shoulder, he confirms that there is no sense of discomfort left.

"Good grief, this isn't the work of a civil official! At any rate, what was that failing magic healing potion that Origa-san opened?" (Doelgar)

"It was simple water I filled in a bottle that had been used up before." (Hifumi)

Doelgar, towards the pitiful Origa who had been completely deceived, with a shrug of his shoulders.
He had acted out the drama as it had been dictated in the scripted play he had previously received from Caim.
Even the muttering that enraged Origa was naturally something he had been told to do on purpose.

"However, why was it necessary to do something troublesome?" (Doelgar)

"It's an experiment to see whether people really rush without thinking just because things are in the middle of advancing smoothly as often happens on the spur of the moment." (Hifumi)

"Fuu~n … I don't quite understand what people in a high position think about." (Doelgar)

Without any particular interest, Doelgar gave a suiting answer while collecting the bottle and arrow that had fallen to the ground.

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As soon as they entered Origa's office, Kasha smashed the magic tool from atop the pouch.
At the same moment the magic tool that Pajou possesses should break as well. Before long the Third Knight Unit would raid this mansion.

"Kasha. I want to be next to Hifumi-sama after all …" (Origa)

"No, you will become a nuisance during the medical treatment. Leaving that aside, is your foot alright?" (Kasha)

Even while worrying about her, Kasha wanted to stop Origa leaving until things had somehow concluded. Thus she tightly grabbed her shoulder and forced her to sit on a chair.
After being separated for five days, feeling the body beneath the robe, Kasha noticed that Origa had become slightly burly. Even though the time they had been apart hadn't been that long, she remembered her loneliness.

"Since the reinforcements will also arrive soon, let's return to the capital once that person comes." (Kasha)

"… That person?" (Origa)

Origa's gaze, showing her sensing something, changed from the girlish face shaking with anxiety just before to something sharp she directed at an enemy.

"Do you know someone from the reinforcements? Why does Kasha know something about them I am not aware of?" (Origa)

Kasha wasn't able to retort anything towards that piercing look.
Finally, after hesitating for a short while, Kasha decided to tell Origa everything and to take her along even if she had to do it by force. She looked directly into Origa's eyes.

"Listen to me, Origa. Soon the Third Knight Unit will enter this mansion. And then, they …" (Kasha)

"… They are aiming at Hifumi-sama." (Origa)

Once again Kasha was lost staying only silent.

"I had been suspicious of you from the beginning. Although you should have stayed away after becoming scared of Hifumi-sama, you returned readily. Moreover your gaze kept following Hifumi-sama from time to time. That is a habit of Kasha while waiting and observing a monster looking for an opportunity. Since it didn't suit your normal self, I though that you were aiming for something … but once we entered this room, you did something. It was something giving off the feel as if magic had been invoked." (Origa)

"I was asked to inform Pajou if Hifumi was in danger. Well, it's not like I forgot about the favor I received by him picking me up, but that only happened because he purchased me by paying money! Origa, you have gradually become weird after meeting Hifumi! Think properly about it, Hifumi often does good things, but in reality, isn't he a criminal who murdered royalty?!" (Kasha)

Losing her presence of mind, Kasha's voice became louder and louder.
While watching the appearance of Kasha, who was rattling on, Origa stood up despite her light-headedness and took out a shuriken from within her bosom.

"S-Stop … Let us two hunt monsters happily together once again. There is no place for us in a world where killing people is the norm …" (Kasha)

"Draw your sword, Kasha. You have clearly become our enemy now." (Origa)

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It was the civil official slave Caim who went to greet Pajou's group storming into the mansion.
Towards the group of more than 20 knights suddenly entering, although it got close to becoming a turmoil, Caim, donning his usual cool-headed nature and suppressed them by shouting 「Don't increase my work!」 with a threatening resounding voice.

"You have been awaited." (Caim)

Caim said to Pajou, who led the Knight Unit, without even lowering his head.

"Awaited you say …" (Pajou)

"Of course, it means that the major of this city's territory, Hifumi-sama, welcomes you. I have heard from Hifumi-sama that you took upon yourself to come from the far away royal capital leading an army. Now, please head towards the office on the second floor. Please excuse my impoliteness, but it is a matter of involving the military affairs. Because we, the civil officials and staff, were ordered to not get close, please go on ahead to the upper floor." (Caim)

Despite speaking politely, there wasn't even any expression of respect in his manner of speech. Without saying anything, Pajou's group left Caim's side.
Neither Caim nor anyone else made a comment towards the matter of her entire Knight Unit having drawn their swords.

“Was that alright?” (Brokra)

Even as Brokra, being a civil official slave engaged in the accounting management alongside Caim, asked this uneasily, Caim only turned his look towards him blinking his eyes.

“There is nothing good or bad about it. This place is the castle of that gentleman. That is already sufficient reason.” (Caim)

He thought about telling Brokra to return to his work if he understood, but seeing his discomposed state he couldn’t find the right words for that.
Looking up at the Knight Unit climbing the stairs in the direction of the second floor, he sorrowfully wondered whether he had to summon some soldiers to clean up again.

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At the time Pajou stepped into the office, Hifumi had collapsed in front of the sofa.
With the blood spread on the floor, he didn’t even show a twitch of movement.

“This is …” (Pajou)

Curious whether he had already died, Pajou approached timidly. In that moment Hifumi jumped up as if he was a monkey and treading on a knight in order to get over the group he landed in front of the door blocking their exit.

“Yo, you’re late.” (Hifumi)

“Wh-Why … ?” (Pajou)

“N~ The actors are bad and the stage is crude as well. Leaving that aside, hurry up and prepare your swords.” (Hifumi)

Like that Hifumi put his right foot in front into a stance with his legs in a L-shape remaining unarmed and pushed out both his swinging hands in front of him. *(T/N: If you watch anime, you should know this pose. I think it is often used in Noh theatre plays by the actor symbolizing the demon. Jiraiya from Naruto likes to do that pose as well. Basically both hands in front, 1 foot in front, crouching and swaying)*

“Do you plan to fight these numbers empty-handed? Rather than that, wouldn’t it be more comfortable to get yourself arrested obediently?” (Pajou)

Pretending to be calm Pajou spoke those words, but the moment she finished, Hifumi grabbed the neck of a male knight in a flash, drew him into his chest, and broke his neck.

“It’s not like you came here to gently persuade me, don’t you agree? If you have the spare time to yap, then get over here quickly.” (Hifumi)

Throwing away the corpse of the knight, Hifumi said in ill-humor.

“Although I don’t know who came up with this farce, after taking over this troublesome post of feudal lord and enduring one hardship after another, this is the treatment I receive in the end. I even feel more amused than angry.” (Hifumi)

“You!!”

The knight, swinging his sword alongside his yell, had his sword averted by Hifumi striking the lower part of his wrist and was brought down while having his neck detained.
Without time to get up, his throat was crushed by Hifumi’s fist.

The knight who came stabbing his sword, had the back of his hand seized and his wrist broken by twisting it.
Hifumi's knee broke his elbow.
His head was cut open halfway by his own sword being stolen from him just like that.

"The taste of killing them is bad. They should hone their skills properly." (Hifumi)

Tossing away the sword soaked in blood, it lopped off the arm coming for a horizontal slash and, using his centrifugal force, he drove the knight into the wall.
The knight, having his face banged against the wall, sunk to the ground while leaving a streaking smear of blood on the wall.
Now he was assaulted with swords by three knights at the same time, but avoiding the sword's path easily while walking forward, he kicked the back of the knee of one knight and twisted the kneeling knight's neck.
Throwing the corpse at a knight, he grabbed the arm of another knight rushing towards him and knocking him down by pushing him with his hands he crushed the face, that was looking up, under his foot.
Even the person, who was struggling being pinned down by the corpse, was killed in a similar manner of crushing the throat by stepping on it.
While watching her colleagues being killed one by one just like that, Pajou took out a tiny iron pebble from within her pouch at her waist though she felt impatient.
It was the stone thrown to kill the guard at the night she met Hifumi for the first time.
The second Hifumi was caught up in breaking the neck of the last knight, she threw the stone with all her might.

"Oh" (Hifumi)

Thrusting out his opponent holding him by his neck, the stone embedded itself into his face.
Although the knight screamed due to the abrupt pain, his heart soon stopped beating as Hifumi immediately tread on his back with force.

"You have a considerably good arm. But, the throwing motion has to be done even more casual. Otherwise it is too easily noticed." (Hifumi)

"Thanks for the lecturing, even though it's coming from a hoodlum. Anyway, I didn't expect you to deal with the Knight Unit as easily as this …" (Pajou)

Hifumi took out his katana and drew it towards Pajou who had once again set up her sword.

"I have received various favors from you. Therefore I will kill you instantly." (Hifumi)

"I wonder whether it will be this simple." (Pajou)

"If it doesn't end quickly, that will be something enjoyable." (Hifumi)

The bright smile of Hifumi and his eyes filled with madness caused Pajou to grind her molars.
As Hifumi broke into her range lightly thrusting at her, Pajou brushed off the katana from the side and cut at him in a flowing motion.
Dodging the sword attack by retreating a half-step, Hifumi once again stepped forward while aiming at the crown of her head.
Pajou jumped to the rear in a hurry. The downward swing of Hifumi's katana changed into a thrust and the katana's point approached her rapidly.

"Kuu" (Pajou)

When Pajou raised her face after avoiding the thrust by rolling over, there wasn't anyone in front of her eyes.

"Eh?" (Pajou)

She looked at the katana protruding from her breast.

“Even at the time of evasion you shouldn’t take off your eyes off your opponent.” (Hifumi)

Ah, this is the place where I die, as Pajou thought that, her feelings mysteriously calmed down.

“Ime … raria … sa, ma …” (Pajou)

Being separated from the katana by slipping down the blade, only a single line of tears could be seen on the face of the fallen Pajou.
Getting rid off the blood with a paper, Hifumi returned the katana into its scabbard while cracking his neck.

“She had splendid backbone to die staying still like that. Well, shall I go and see the situation over there.” (Hifumi)

Stepping over the dead bodies of the Knight Unit, Hifumi headed towards the room where Origa’s group was.

T/N: I added a new illustration to the ToC (of volume 3) which is more fitting for the current arc, I think. Feel free to check it out here

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Chapter 43 – When It's Over

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The vicinity of the Fokalore's Lord's mansion was crowded with the populace taking refuge from the front lines, the territorial soldiers, and staff members guiding them on top of the Third Knight Unit who lead the soldiers of the reinforcements.
The staff distributed meals to the populace and aided those with deteriorating health. Gradually the mood changed into it being something along the lines of a festival.
Those with a strong business sense erected stalls before anyone noticed. The staff members only arranged the locations of the food stalls and let them freely do business afterwards.

"This ought to be a time of war, but what's with this situation?" (Midas)

Advancing on his horse while pushing his way through the masses, Midas' group finally left the jammed area.

"The populace seems to have been kept away from the gate where the battle occurred." (Young knight)

Listening to the report from a young knight who had heard the current state of affairs from the staff members, Midas breathed a sigh.

"Did they carefully consider the circumstances of the populace? Or is it because they would simply become a nuisance … ?" (Midas)

There is a quite high probability that it is the latter, he assessed, but didn't voice out this thought as he had to hurry going forward on his horse towards the battlefield.
While also issuing instructions to all members to draw their swords, he scowled feeling a sense of discomfort.

"That's odd…" (Midas)

"What is?" (Young knight)

"Don't you think it's strangely silent although they should be in combat? Rather, the noise coming from the direction of the Lord's mansion is a lot more boisterous." (Midas)

"Now that you mention it." the young knight agreed to Midas' remark. As they headed towards the actual scene, the horses advanced on the road that had at least a lesser amount of people travelling it.
Before long they could see an imposing iron gate at the exit of the city, but the door was widely opened.

"! … Did they break through? However, the enemies are …" (Young knight)

Trying to hasten their approach, they could see the territorial soldiers chatting leisurely while disposing of the enemies' corpses.
As they were calmly talking with each other, they chopped up the corpses with magic and halberds, gathered them and tossed them into a hole. Drenching them in oil, each pile was burned.
Although the intense stench of the burning proteins was to such a degree that Midas had to pinch his nose, the territorial soldiers did it calmly having nothing but a cloth wrapped around the lower part of their faces.

Because they observed the relaxed state of the territorial soldiers in front of the mountain of dead bodies, all of the Third Knight Unit following from behind looked at them. All of them uniformly turned blue and some amongst them, not being able to bear the sight, even broke down vomiting.
Midas considered it to be pathetic, but it appears that the soldiers and knights from the capital can't overturn the difference in actual combat experience of the Touno territorial soldiers anymore.
When surveying the area, Midas saw a single women, he felt having seen somewhere before, issuing orders to the soldiers.
As Midas dismounted from his horse and withdrew his hand from his sword, she apparently noticed him as well.

"I am Midas of the Third Knight Unit. We were dispatched as reinforcements, but …" (Midas)

"I am the civil official slave called Miyukare in charge of matters related to military affairs of the Touno territory. Welcome, I am glad that you have come to assist us." (Miyukare)

As Miyukare responded with a bright smile, Midas recalled her to be included in Hifumi's group of civil official slaves. He happened to catch sight of her at the time various things were taught to her by Hifumi at the royal castle.

"I'd like you to inform me about the state of affairs." (Midas)

"The Vichy general is dead. Right about now the remnants of the defeated army are fleeing from the chasing group led by the director of military affairs." (Miyukare)

The battle at Fokalore has ended. All that was now left was simply hunting the remnants of the Vichy army.

"Where's the enemy's general?" (Midas)

"Who knows? I heard he was in some hole. About now he should have been cremated within one of them." (Miyukare)

Midas groaned while curbing the area between his eyebrows.
Just like Hifumi, it seems that they, the Touno territorial soldiers and the civil official slaves, don't care about who and what rank the enemy has in the least.
Dispose of them since they are dead and then be done with it.

"By the way." (Miyukare)

Miyukare smiled brightly at Midas who was greatly troubled with the situation.

"Since it's about time to finish soon, shouldn't you rather head towards the mansion?" (Miyukare)

"Finish soon? … What matter is?" (Midas)

"Hifumi-sama's disgusting play, that is." (Miyukare)

Midas' thoughts froze for an instant. Without saying anything in return, he jumped on top of his horse and rushed towards the Lord's mansion.

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Preparing the shuriken, Origa entrusted her back to the wall enduring the pain in her foot.

"Kasha, I won't forgive you …" (Origa)

"Calm down! The Knight Unit has already broken into the mansion. Now that this has happened, Hifumi is already …" (Kasha)

Just as she started to talk, Origa threw her four-sided shuriken tearing Kasha's shoulder.
Due to her avoiding on the spur of the moment, the wound was shallow.

"Origa, why … ?" (Kasha)

"I won't bear it anymore. All the more if a Knight Unit had come, I must got to Hifumi-sama's side." (Origa)

As Origa prepared the next shuriken, Kasha, giving up, grasped the sword's grip, withdrew it from its scabbard and took her stance.

"I will suppress you with sheer strength." (Kasha)

"Give your best trying to do so. I will show you that I am not such a weak woman as you are." (Origa)

Kasha closed the distance bit-by-bit. Origa, having her back against the wall as she couldn't use her foot, had no other choice but move horizontally along the wall by slithering.
Taking care to not cause injuries as much as possible, Kasha wavered which spot she should attack.

"Without even having your wand, there is no way for you to defeat me." (Kasha)

"Underestimating the abilities of your opponent like that is a bad habit of yours. Shouldn't I have warned you many times to not do so?" (Origa)

Firing off the second shuriken, she aimed at Kasha's feet.
Kasha jumped to the side while wielding the sword in order to avert the trajectory of the shuriken. In reverse she charged and hit Origa's flank.

"Kuu …" (Origa)

Origa had planned to elude the attack by falling down but her body didn't move as she thought it would. She wasn't able to kill the force completely.
She collapsed lying upside-down and as Origa was breathing roughly, Kasha lowered her sword.

"With this you understand, right? Let's go together … I don't want to do such detestable thing like seriously fighting with Origa." (Kasha)

Origa heavily rotated turning her position facing upwards and silently held out her right hand towards Kasha.

"I am glad. Well then, after this, together …" (Kasha)

A sound like grass being cut reverberated. Kasha's flank has been gouged open by a wind blade.
An amount of blood, which would overrun a glass, dropped on the floor.

"… Ha?" (Kasha)

Because she doesn't quite understand the visible condition of her own body, Kasha falls to her knees due to the sudden blood loss.
Spilling even more blood this way.

"Although you don't even have your wand, why …?" (Kasha)

Looking at Origa with hazy eyes, she saw that the area of the robe around her arms was torn. Around the naked slender forearm leather belt with a fixed knife was coiled.

"Following Hifumi's suggestion, I prepared a hidden knife copying the magicians of Horant. Giving your magician

opponent the time to cast a spell was naive.” (Origa)

As they finished talking, both, Origa and Kasha, had collapsed on the floor.

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At the point in time Hifumi stepped into the room entering it, Kasha was at death’s door.
For the time being with this Hifumi poured a magic potion, with the bottle making a *glug glug* sound, on Origa in order to wake her up. Seeing the unhurt Hifumi in front of her eyes, she misunderstood herself to have died.
But, once she looked closely, she could see Kasha lying in a pool of blood.

“Hifumi-sam … ?” (Origa)

“Ou, you finally woke up.” (Hifumi)

“I-I am glad you are healthy?! … Ah right, Kasha has called a Knight Unit to this mansion … !” (Origa)

Getting up as if she were a spring, Origa kept on talking while clinging to Hifumi. But Hifumi quickly tore her off causing her to fall on the floor.

“Calm down, moron. I got rid of the entire attacking Knight Unit. Currently Doelgar’s group is cleaning up the mess.” (Hifumi)

With a “That’s great” Origa was relieved spilling large drops of tears.
As Origa was sobbing, Kasha, slipping into the abyss of death, murmured with her consciousness being vacant,

“Hifumi-san … Ah, Pajou-san has …” (Kasha)

That knight had given her and Origa a chance to reconcile. Realising that she had failed and died, Kasha didn’t give a damn about everything and anything anymore.

“Kasha, apologise to Hifumi now. It isn’t too late yet …” (Origa)

Looking at Hifumi and Kasha alternately, Origa said so in her former gentle voice.
That caused Kasha to become unbearably sad.

“Origa, sorry … Hifumi-san too, I am sorry … I have been a fool …” (Kasha)

“Hifumi-sama, since she is also repenting …” (Origa)

Watching Kasha heading towards her death now, Origa couldn’t even hide her trembling.
But Hifumi watched Kasha without saying a single word.

“By now … everything and anything has changed, hey … not only I didn’t notice that, I wasn’t even approved by Pajou-san either …” (Kasha)

Looking at Hifumi, Kasha laughed bitterly.

“Hifumi-san, thank you for saving us when we were slaves … If you are fine with it, I want you to let me pass on as is … I think this manner of death is a blessing, to the extent that it is more than a fool like me deserves …” (Kasha)

Hifumi nodded expressionlessly.

“Thank you …” (Kasha)

“Kasha!” (Origa)

Kasha slowly closed her eyelids to never open them again.
Painfully raising her breast up and down only once, her breathing ceased.

“Really, you have been such a fool …” (Origa)

Sitting down at the side of her close friend, she shed tears as she also stopped to pretend being tough.
Hifumi took a breath and placed his hands on his waist.
In his mind he hosted a little bit of compassion but no regret.
Most of it was occupied by anger.

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Pushing his way through the crowd, Midas finally arrived at the mansion. He was greeted by an unhurt Hifumi, donning an expression of anger and Origa, being even more angry burning with fury.
Being guided to the office by himself, Midas discerned that the situation had turned out in the worst possible way.
Brooding over his own fate from now on, his feet became heavy.

“… So?” (Hifumi)

As Midas stood stock still without being able to look at Hifumi in front of his eyes, a short inquiry was thrown at him.

“T-The reinforcements weren’t in time. It’s inexcusable that we weren’t able to fulfill the role given to us …” (Midas)

“To the very end you insist that you came up until here to assist us? Is that what you are saying?” (Origa)

“O-Of course” (Midas)

He couldn’t even shift his gaze towards Origa.

“Is it common for the reinforcements to storm the Lord’s office with drawn swords in this country?” (Hifumi)

“U …” (Midas)

“Is it common for a Knight Unit, no, the royal castle to even use a friend to spy on the internal affairs?” (Hifumi)

“Ugu …” (Midas)

As Midas’ thoughts deviated into *I would pay anything for just having a usable answer*, Hifumi pressed on.

“Besides, it’s strange, isn’t it? Imeraria should have known that Vichy would attack the national border having prepared a sufficient war potential. Or rather, since she has induced this, shouldn’t she have sent reinforcements a lot earlier?” (Hifumi)

“No, such expectations … In reality the second son of a Marquis household, Debold-sama, had been dispatched as envoy of peace to Vichy.” (Midas)

“Is that so? That means an envoy of peace delivers such a provocative letter in this world?” (Hifumi)

The letter that was thrown at Midas was the on Hifumi had taken out from Debold’s breast pocket.

“This is … !” (Midas)

It had Imeraria’s signature. Thrusting unreasonable demands at Vichy, no matter how you looked at it, the contents couldn’t be called anything but hostile.

“Well then, I want you to properly convey to Imeraria that she has overstepped her bounds this time. Now matter

how kind I may be, even I have my limits.” (Hifumi)

What kindness are you talking about? Were his thought reflected on his face? Origa pointed an icy gaze at Midas to the degree of making him shiver.

“It came to a point where it would be proper for me to receive yours and the princess’ heads. Shouldn’t you be grateful for the generous treatment of Hifumi-sama?” (Origa)

“I-I am very sorry …” (Midas)

While bowing his head in apology, Midas raised an 「Oya?」 having a question towards Origa’s just spoken words.
Going by the current way of the talks, it sounds like me and the princess can survive.

“There was far too little resistance, I guess …” (Hifumi)

“Ha?” (Midas)

“The degree of the scheme was too little, even for Pajou. Also, the soldiers of Vichy attacking straight from the front like idiots, didn’t divert from our predictions in the least. Although Origa seems to be able handling it well, Kasha wasn’t able to implement what she had been taught at all.” (Hifumi)

Midas suddenly couldn’t follow what Hifumi was talking about.

“Due to the long, long history of wars in my country and world, there are many substantial studies repeatedly refining the art of efficiently killing your enemies, such as those heavily armored, those riding a horse, those being separated from their allies and those being swift, no matter the circumstances. As a result of that, many created military strategies and weapons vanished, making it literally a struggle to survive for those.” (Hifumi)

Maa, though I ended up completely forgetting those things recently, Hifumi inserted an idle complaint in his mind.

“However, after coming here, the opponents I faced were only luke-warm opponents at best. I first thought that it was only this country, but it seems the other countries aren’t any different in that regard either. As I worked as adventurer and statesman, I always pondered about it and at last I reached a conclusion.” (Hifumi)

“Th-The conclusion is …” (Midas)

As Midas feared he would hear something absurd and his desire to escape from this place right away was almost stirred up, he resisted those up-welling feelings as he had to convey what Hifumi was going to say to the princess.

“There isn’t enough fighting in this world. There isn’t enough desperation to stake their life on fighting between people. Therefore I decided to make my move.” (Hifumi)

“What the hell are you planning to do …?” (Midas)

Although he didn’t want to hear it, he couldn’t help but listen to it.
And just as he thought, Midas regretted hearing about it.

“I will spread the methods of fighting in order for the human society to become self-aware and come to their senses all around the world. Oh well, if I drill thousands of people scattered throughout the world in the ways of war, my intent will naturally come true, don’t you think?” (Hifumi)

“In other words, you will raise well-trained people to pit them against each other all around the world? Is that what you are saying?”

“It’s a magnificent idea. Of course I will also do my very best to help you.” (Origa)

Even though Origa said this as if it was natural, Hifumi gave up while thinking *No matter what I tell her, she will accompany me anyway*.

“Ah! I will use this territory as is. Once in a while I will return here. I want a place where I can run various experiments as well.” (Hifumi)

As result the people brought up in this territory will become ‘people who might cause damage to Orsongrande in the future’.
That’s just madness.
(However, there is no way to decline this …) (Midas)
Most likely even Imeraria won’t be able to refuse.
Especially since this is the second time her life has been spared.
He even seized disadvantageous evidence.

As Hifumi laughed joyfully, Midas frantically endured strong stomach pains.

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Chapter 44 – Points Of Authority

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Because of Alyssa's pursuit the numbers of the Vichy army dwindled even more though they took flight escaping Rhone.
The offensive lasted for a few days and the activity of the border security in Rhone was arranged to resume. All was explained to the citizens of Arosel and the tidying up began. Alyssa returned to Arosel wearing a tired facial expression.

"… Sleepy" (Alyssa)

"Yes, thanks for your hard work. Sleep well." (Origa)

Having received the report from Alyssa, Origa saw her off unsteadily returning to her own room within the building of the Lord.
Origa herself had to commit herself to such things as returning the temporarily refuging citizens back to their own homes and giving orders to the soldiers left behind to clean up the city. Having her injury completely healed by the magic potion, she acted more vigorously than before.
And now she is handling her own and Hifumi's share of travel preparations.
In the briefing session with Midas, Midas had no other choice but to accept the one-sided instructions in regards to the report contents from Hifumi. The result was a report stating Pajou and the other knights of the Third Knight Unit, which Hifumi had killed, had been killed in action in the battle with Vichy.
Because it would cause a huge loss of face for the royalty, if the truth of Imeraria giving the order to assassinate another noble were to be spread, Midas gladly accepted that kind of conclusion as it was far more amicable than he had imagined it to be. Although it was wrong towards Pajou, there was no better solution without this whole situation having a dramatic impact on the princess.
But Midas' tension recurred once he heard Hifumi's words after this topic was settled.

"I will go to the royal castle soon as I have to talk with Imeraria." (Hifumi)

"Yo-You have to talk… ?" (Midas)

"No matter how you look at it, I am a noble of Orsongrande, so it is necessary to return triumphantly and give a report of the victory, I think." (Hifumi)

Like this it became a matter of Hifumi heading towards the royal capital, alongside the surviving members of the Third Knight Unit, by himself without taking any soldiers along. In order to protect the territory, all of the territorial soldiers will be left behind.

"It will be only us, so I won't particularly mind if you attack me during the trip, okay?" (Hifumi)

"You must be joking…" (Midas)

As Hifumi laughed impishly, Midas barely managed to squeeze out an answer.

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The political centre of Horant is the capital city, Ludan.
The Ludan castle, where the aged king Suprangel Geng Horant *(T/N: >> Supurangeru Gengu Horanto)* resides, is called royal castle. He has been holding the throne for the long time of 50 years.
However, the one having substantial ability in the ways of politics, being his directly descending grandchild, was Belldore. *(T/N: >> Verudore <<)*
The elder king had declared to pass the crown to Belldore, who had no children of his own. Even the experiment with the magic tool, orchestrated by Vichy, was something pushed forward by Belldore for the sake of gaining moderate accomplishments.
With the authority of the king being very powerful, the order of royalty is an absolute for the few nobles of Horant as well. The standing of regular soldiers drafted from the common folk is quite low. But the gathering of funds upon the king's order for the sake of developing the magic tool had been remarkable. With the wealth that was brought about due to the magic tools, criticism from the masses was suppressed.

"How is the situation developing?" (Suprangel)

"It's going well." (Belldore)

When the king inquired with a hoarse voice, Belldore answered standing upright.

"The aggression-rising magic tool *Ganga* and the emotions-restraining magic tool *Elrik* are almost complete, too." (Belldore)

"However, there are flaws as well…" (Suprangel)

"Installing *Ganga* causes the target to go on a rampage or die. Being upon the effect of *Elrik* causes the actions of the target to become sluggish. Also, the target's judgement declines sharply. Still, there are ways for practical use either way. There won't be any problems if we use it only on soldiers and make sure to have the commander make the judgments and give out directions to the soldiers." (Belldore)

As Belldore answered confidently puffing up with pride, King Suprangel nodded his head.

"Very well. It is fine to go with your results as they are. You will also give the researchers a reward to show them your generosity." (Suprangel)

"I shall follow your words." (Belldore)

Furthermore the king decided to listen to the opinion of Belldore concerning the situation in the other countries.

"… For some reason Vichy and Orsongrande seem to be noisy…" (Suprangel)

"It appears that there is a young noble of Orsongrande, having obtained the trust of the princess, acting violently and rudely. He has been bestowed the territory including the national border to Vichy. I hear he shaved off an unknown size of territory of Vichy. Isn't the battle continuing even now?" (Belldore)

"Even at the border of our country to Orsongrande there seems to be movement." (Suprangel)

"Since we have officially sided with Vichy and because even our country's soldiers are heading towards the border, they have apparently deployed their soldiers in response. They won't attempt to make contact though." (Belldore)

If they start an all-out war on this side, it will become a war at two fronts for Orsongrande. It means that while continuing the war with Vichy, Orsongrande won't start something right way. That was the common opinion shared by King and grandchild. Once the war with with Vichy ends, the reason for Horant to deploy its soldiers will vanish

as well.

“Orsongrande’s side has raised a set amount of military gains. Although the general outline is that it will end with Vichy’s side compromising, they are more or less resisting the outcome. Putting aside their quality, Vichy has prepared a great number of soldiers.” (Belldore)

After contemplating for a while about this information, the king said slowly as if chewing it thoroughly,

“Well then … Once the state of affairs has calmed down and the soldiers deployed at the border to Orsongrande can be withdrawn, I will use the opportunity to retire from this position.” (Suprangel)

“That is…” (Belldore)

“You will become the next king. It will be good for governing this country. But, show me the proof of the magic tools, *Ganga* and *Elrik*, being effective on the border soldiers. I have decided this to be your first accomplishment as king.” (Suprangel)

“Ha, I will make my move at once.” (Belldore)

“Umu, I am waiting for the good news.” (Suprangel)

For the news, of Hifumi leading the small force of Fokalore’s territorial troops against the military forces of Vichy and repelling them, to circulate in Horant, a few more days were still necessary.

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There is a town called Münster *(T/N: >> Miyunsuta)* extremely close to the national border to Horant on Orsongrande’s side.
This town has the same scale as Fokalore and, including several farm villages in its circumference, an earl called Biron is governing it.
Biron isn’t particularly close to either the prince or the princess. He wasn’t very well-informed about the situation taking place close to Vichy where Fokalore played a central role as his territory could also be said to be on the opposite side. Even the the request for stationing the troops of the Second Knight Unit this time was something he only reluctantly accepted due to the documents having the signature of the prince. The communication with the knight unit also only started at the time the Second Knight Unit’s captain, Stifels, came to visit in order to exchange greetings. Biron’s stance was “Just do whatever you want.”

“Why has a knight unit come all the way to this place?” (Biron)

Without trying to conceal his dissatisfaction, Biron complained to his butler, standing close-by, as he was sitting dead tired on a sofa.
He was a still young head of a household at the age of 30 years. With the death due to illness of his father 5 years ago, he was called back home to succeed the Earlship although he had been working as bureaucrat in the capital.
Even the current circumstances, he understands that Vichy and Horant have a connection notwithstanding the lack of information. He also knew that there wasn’t even any point in provoking Horant. Of course, anticipating an emergency situation, a lot more soldiers are patrolling the area close to the border than usual. He also knew well that he might have to to dispatch troops on short call.
At any rate, since quite many soldiers were deployed to another place, the maintanence of public order in the whole town started to show holes. His only wish was for the whole situation to quickly finish not caring whether the rising noble Hifumi, whose face he doesn’t even know, wins or loses.
Not only that, in regards to the Second Knight Unit, turning up here recklessly and in a fighting mood, Biron was highly vigilant.
If something strange happens and hostilities with Horant unfold, he doesn’t have the intention to lose, but he will feel

unease about the safety of the town of Münster. His own territorial soldiers will be depleted as well.
Moreover, the Second Knight Unit is building a simple fortress in the middle between Münster and the national border. It goes even as far that they are talking about inviting Prince Ayperos there for encouragement. To begin with, due to the influence of the princess' popularity, Prince Ayperos has a thin presence with the plain achievements he has earned. Biron can do nothing but sigh.

"I guess it is a suggestion by the queen, but doesn't she understand that starting a war here will cause his evaluation to pummel even more?" (Biron)

Or, do they have some certain plan for victory or tools able to make it happen, I wonder? Biron pondered about that. But if there were such things, it would be impossible for that haughty, over-confident Stifels to stay silent about it.

"If that new viscount called Hifumi or something like that is able to defeat Vichy at an early stage, then…" (Biron)

It reached the point that Biron thought to join Princess Imeraria's faction, if he gets involved in the movements of the prince and the Second Knight Unit, although he kept a neutral stance before.

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Hifumi, entering the royal castle together with Midas's group of the Third Knight Unit, was immediately allowed to have an audience in the audience room. It seems to be about the matter of being conferred some kind of reward. Because of Midas using a fast to report the state of affairs, the room was dominated by an air of restlessness as if something had to be frantically smoothed over.
(*I guess they plan to pay reparations. I think that's an idea the prime minister came up with.*) (Hifumi)
While thinking *Maa, I don't really care either way*, Hifumi knelled merely for form's sake.
Suppressing the quivering of her legs seeing that figure, Imeraria talked about the recognition of his services while standing in the audience room.
Her voice seemed to shake, but since the eyes of the other nobles rested on her, she desperately put strength into her stomach.

"Your military gains on this occasion were very splendid. Crushing a large army with such a small force is something that will be handed down to future generation in this country. It is extremely regrettable that the Third Knight Unit suffered such victims, but…" (Imeraria)

Although she senses how the inner part of her eyes is heating up due to bitterness, she keeps pasting a smile on her face.

"… As reward for his achievements this time, Hifumi Touno shall become an earl and be given new territory in addition to the territory gained as result of the war. Does anyone have an objection to this decree?" (Imeraria)

The nobles, lined up on both sides of the audience hall, remained silent.
It doesn't look like they are giving their active support to this decree, but there is no way to not confer any reward in light of this much distinguished war service. Besides they didn't think anyone would want something like a region placed in-between Hifumi's territory and a foreign country.

"It doesn't seem that there is an objection. So be it. As replacement for my deceased father, the king, I, in my name as Imeraria Torie Orsongrande, grant Hifumi Touno the title of earl of the Orsongrande kingdom." (Imeraria)

Sporadic applause could be heard. Hifumi got up remaining silent and left the audience hall after turning a fleeting glance at Imeraria.
While seeing him off and whispering in low voices about this impoliteness, the nobles left the hall before being prompted to do so by Imeraria.

“Imeraria-sama.” (Prime Minister)

Choosing the time when the other nobles had departed the hall, the prime minister stepped forward.

“What is it?” (Imeraria)

“That is… was it alright to do that?” (Prime Minister)

“What else did you expect me to do? There is no way that this country’s defense war potential can deal with him anymore. I have also heard about Hifumi’s turbulent kind of plan from Midas, but nevertheless there is no other choice but to use the fact that Hifumi-sama is affiliated to this country. Currently it is impossible to eliminate him.” (Imeraria)

After looking fleetingly at the king’s throne Imeraria tugged her pursed lips.

“Confirm the reason why he isn’t killing me. And then don’t fail to ask him directly what he is planning to do from now on. Please come to my office later on and give me a report.” (Imeraria)

“That is, because it is dangerous…” (Prime Minister)

“It will be futile to worry about plans or guards if it is meaningless.” (Imeraria) *(T/N: In other words, no matter what they plan, any action will be pointless if they don’t know what Hifumi is planning)*

Hearing about the news of having lost a trusted subordinate, Imeraria felt shaken for a short while, calming down only slightly. It would be intolerable for her to stop her own assigned duty for something like weeping.

“What is Ayperos doing?” (Imeraria)

“I was told he departed this morning to observe the battlefield at Horant.” (Prime Minister)

“Such a selfish thing…” (Imeraria)

Even though it would be fine for him to focus on preparing to become the next king , Imeraria thought. Prince Ayperos, having no accomplishments of his own, had consulted with his mother, the queen, without Imeraria knowing about it. She didn’t consider it to be necessary for the next king to be accomplished either.
Anyways, as the situation had to only settle down for the sake of crowning Ayperos, this was Imeraria’s current goal.

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With Hifumi returning to the antechamber of the room prepared for him, Origa, waiting as chamberlain, stood up and greeted him.
Sabnak of the Third Knight Unit is present there as well. Having been summoned by Hifumi, he wore a bewildered facial expression.

“You are early, Sabnak. Take a seat for the time being.” (Hifumi)

“What business do you have with me… ?” (Sabnak)

Sabnak had been informed by Midas about Pajou’s final moments. On that occasion he was told that there is no malice regarding his survival, but as he still has betrayed his colleagues, he can’t sweep away his dread of possibly being killed.

“It’s fine to not have such formal posture. Just now I have also taken hold of the old Vichy territory ranging from Rhone to Arosel. I have also obtained the rank of earl.” (Hifumi)

He drank the tea Origa had prepared.

“Congratulations. Though it feels lacking as compensation for trying to harm Hifumi-sama.” (Origa)

Towards Origa’s words of praise, Hifumi gives an appropriate answer with “Ah, yes.” He has stopped listening to her seriously.

“From me likewise, congratulations. With this you are in name and reality a member of the greater nobles of Orsongrande.” (Sabnak)

“I don’t give a damn about the title, but there is hope that we can earn the necessary funds for our activities with this. But there aren’t enough helping hands.” (Hifumi)

“Helping hands?” (Sabnak)

Sabnak, not wanting to recall the only vague memories of an already remote past, remembers the hell of paperwork called temporary feudal lord of Fokalore and cold sweat runs down his spine.

“It is necessary to entrust the acting of a proxy for me to someone since I will be absent from the territory for a while.” (Hifumi)

In his eardrums Sabnak can hear the *doki doki* of his heart from within his body.

“Since the civil official slaves can handle it to a certain degree, it will be settled by acting as boss. Everything has been prepared as well, so it will be good if you come to Fokalore for around 10 days.” (Hifumi)

It has already been decided to designate Sabnak.
Including the case with Pajou, Midas, and himself, and considering the matter of turning a blind eye towards the Knight Unit, Sabnak simply wasn’t able to refuse.

“… Understood…” (Sabnak)

Convincing himself that it won’t turn into such a hell like previously this time around as there are even staff members, Sabnak told them that he had to prepare and left.

“Well then, all that is left now is Imeraria.” (Hifumi)

Just as Hifumi muttered this, a white maid enters and tells him that he has been called by Imeraria.

“Origa, gather the populace in front of the castle by having the Third Knight Unit assist you. It has to be a place where they can see the balcony we talked about before. Ah, yea, also tell them “There is an important announcement for the people from the princess.”” (Hifumi)

“Important announcement is it…” (Origa)

“While we are at it, I think it will be refreshing for those in the castle as well.” (Hifumi)

Origa responded to Hifumi’s words with a smile and laughter.

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Chapter 45 – Killer Queen

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“What’s the story with us gathering here, I wonder?”

“It is an announcement by Princess-sama and that Hero-sama, you know.”

“The knight-sama with the thin sword? I heard he played an active role again!”

“They say he repelled the large army of Vichy with a few soldiers.”

The topic of the noisy populace, if one had to say, it is one-sidedly focusing on the new noble of Fokalore, Hifumi, rather than on the princess, but it was mostly due to Hifumi’s orders that it became the talk of the town.
Because of the Third Knight Unit being nonchalantly mixed up within the crowd, although it would be announced by Princess Imeraria after this, the matter of Hifumi’s involvement had been circulated already. This kind of information manipulation work was the first time for the Third Knight Unit, but because of Sabnak leading the operation after having received the request from Origa, it was effective to the degree of surprising all of the knight unit.
Sabnak is also slipping into the crowd.

“Apparently that knight of the thin sword is within the royal castle currently. I am told he has achieved amazing war results with Vichy as his opponent, you know?” (Sabnak)

While buying sweets at a stall, he spreads the topic as gossip.

“Ou, I guess he will again receive a reward from Imeraria-sama. He is a great fellow.”

While smiling at the good response of the old man manning the stall, he watches the reaction of his surroundings in a casual manner and understands that all of the people in this place, the voice had reached, are indeed listening carefully with great interest.
(Good grief, what a way of manipulating the hearts of people. It is a personality resembling the demons from fairy-tales.) (Sabnak)
While continuing the mission, Sabnak had a complicated feeling whether he should feel happy or frightened having accepted this kind of personality in the requested matter.
In the meanwhile, the Third Knight Unit checked everyone standing in front of the royal castle. “Soon the princess will make her appearance!” they repeated continuously in a loud voice.
Even as their voice become hoarse close to being mute, the crowd doesn’t cease to chatter.

“Oh, Princess-sama!”

With someone raising their voice, the commotion subsides. The knights having exhausted their throats ended up feeling depressed.
Having made her appearance on the balcony, it was Princess Imeraria.
And next to her was Hifumi. In a shadowy place near the back Origa could vaguely be seen waiting.
(Well then, what will happen this time?) (Sabnak)
Sabnak had already a feeling that it wasn’t about something possibly happening but rather about something

definitely going to happen.

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Not being at the audience hall anymore, Imeraria had personally invited Hifumi to her office. Urging him into the reception sofa, a maid prepared black tea.

“So, it is about this time’s case, but… ” (Hifumi)

“The entire situation is my responsibility. Although the matter with Pajou is regrettable, I only implore you to not punish the other knight units and the people at the castle. Can you accept just this much… ?” (Imeraria)

Interrupting the topic Hifumi has started, Imeraria straight away apologizes like that.

“Ah, that’s fine already. Even if I acted violently now, it would only be a story of repeatedly dealing with shitty opponents anyway. That’s boring.” (Hifumi)

“In the first place, far from having a foundation in group combat, there isn’t even decent training in inter-personal combat, don’t you agree?” a worn-out dissatisfaction began to leak out from Hifumi’s mouth on the occasion. Although it is strange, Imeraria was relieved that the standard of this castle’s knight’s didn’t raise Hifumi’s interest.

“Then… ” (Imeraria)

“Ah, I am understanding that this time the responsibility is yours. The mastermind died. Since, rather than killing you, there is an even better task left for you, I won’t kill you now.” (Hifumi)

Even though his words aren’t permitting a peace of mind in the least, her life has been spared.
But, I wonder what is that better task than killing me? Imeraria was uneasy. Even if he demanded her as a woman, she wouldn’t be able to refuse. *If he was really desiring this of me, I should try to take my own life, I think?*
However, as she resolved herself by putting strength into her slender arms laying atop her knees, she decided to not give up her life no matter what happens until her brother is safely crowned and until she discovers a plan to somehow calm the man in front of her.
But that plan was quickly denied.

“You will become the sovereign. Because I will support you by getting rid of the opposition, you will become the absolute ruler of this country building a powerful and sturdy state. Let’s say that this will be your atonement for this time’s affair.” (Hifumi)

“Such… ! Then, what about my brother… what will happen to Ayperos? In that kid’s surrounding there are supporters pushing for that kid to become the next king. If I were to aim at becoming the queen, it will end up becoming a strife disregarding mine or that kid’s intention.” (Imeraria)

“I don’t care. There won’t happen anything if he is obedient, but if he opposes this, I will kill him.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi’s face showed that it wasn’t significant enough for him to listen to such topic and that he would cut him down without doubt. It is an extremely calm face.

“However, even if I intend to succeed as queen, I don’t have the ability to do that either… ” (Imeraria)

Before summoning Hifumi, she was unaffected by these matters without getting in contact with them and was simply called saint by the people. Compared to the time she thought *I am only a decoration after all*, she had now reached the point where she took politics into her consideration more or less.
But she hasn’t received any education in becoming a statesman. As a result of that, she has lost the knight she trusted. Currently she is monopolizing this country.

“You are still young. If I am not mistaken, you are 14 years old, right? It is even fine to learn from a noble or the prime minister from now on. Besides, a statesman isn’t a person that does something with their own ability. I believe that you will excel as statesman if you find capable retainers and use them skilfully.” (Hifumi)

Why is that man talking about politics to a royalty like myself? Notwithstanding my confusion, he is giving me words of consolation. Even if only slightly, my feelings are settling down.
However, this is definitely a mistake, she also understood.

“You aren’t an incompetent person like your brother who is clinging to his parent, I think. For now it is fine to make a move in order to protect the country and save those around you. During that time you can forge strong soldiers. Ah, it is also good to send them to Fokalore for training! I will polish them without fail.” (Hifumi)

“… What the hell are you aiming for?” (Imeraria)

“By increasing the amount of strong people it will become a lot more interesting to oppose this world. People who have trained their techniques will oppose people boosting with raw strength. I want to increase the number of people thinking up refined schemes to kill people with sharp senses. I also want new weapons to be created for the sake of killing very efficiently.” (Hifumi)

While having glittering eyes like a boy talking about his dreams, to Imeraria, what Hifumi was talking about, was similar to the words of a tyrant she had only read a bit in the past.

“Then, this world, this country will end up lapsing into chaos.” (Imeraria)

“I wonder whether that’s what will happen or not, it depends on what the people of this world want to do. In the world I come from, war advances technology. For the sake of victory people forge their minds putting a lot of effort into coming up with elaborate schemes.” (Hifumi)

Just what kind of blood-stained world is that? Imeraria became terrified by just imagining it. *From what world had the hero been summoned?’*
It was several young nobles that came and entered the room at that point.

“Imeraria-sama!” (Maid)

The nobles entering in a rude manner pushed the maid standing in attendance aside. Seeing Hifumi’s face they snorted as if scoffing at him.

“I was wondering who it was, but I see it’s the upstart who became a viscount recently, huh? But it seems you were skilfully buttering up to Imeraria. Now that we have arrived, there is no business left here for you anymore.” (Noble)

Furthermore, several of the other nobles also scold Hifumi.

“Imeraria-sama, the commoners are currently gathering in front of the royal castle. Something about receiving words from Imeraria-sama.” (Noble)

“The populace is… ” (Imeraria)

Imeraria turns her sight towards Hifumi.

“Ah, it is me who had them gathered. Let’s make a showy proclamation though you are leading this country only for a short time now, is what I think.” (Hifumi)

In place of Imeraria, who was lost for words, the nobles roared.

“Bastard, you are getting cocky trying to monopolize the national politics.” (Noble A)

“Moreover, what an attitude towards Imeraria-sama! Impermissible!” (Noble B)

While listening to the screaming voices of the nobles totally undisturbed, Hifumi stood up calmly, took out his katana and drew it.
At that moment a single noble had his head separated from his body.

“Men only raising their voices are superfluous. Only those holding the will to fight are necessary.” (Hifumi)

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As Imeraria looks out from the balcony of her office, the entire part of the castle is crowded with people. Even the word ‘many’ is lukewarm in regards to the amount of expectant gazes, she feels.
Up until now she had gazed at the city from this balcony. She had addressed the populace, just like now, many times, but it was the first time for her to step on the stage while feeling this heavy-hearted.
Sporadically seeing the figures of the Third Knight Unit, she inadvertently wanted to call out to them to save her, but this was a situation she had brought upon herself. Although they might come running if she requested their help, she knows what will happen then.
Next to her Hifumi is standing. In the back there is the former slave called Origa, who is now his attendant.
And behind her a number of corpses of the young nobles are scattered about. They have been young nobles not long ago. They didn’t consider in the slightest that the upstart of low social status would oppose them or that he would really kill them.
However, that wasn’t the reality. Without them noticing how kind the world had been to them, their end already came.
From now on the significance of social status will gradually vanish. It will become a world where ability will be the criterion and not pedigree, Hifumi had told her.
Unable to imagine it well, Imeraria asked whether this world wouldn’t become a place where the strong oppress the weak then, but Hifumi laughed and shook his head.

“It is the fetters called birth that label a weak person to remain weak. It will be a world without the binding of lineage making it possible for the weak to defeat the strong.” (Hifumi)

Although Imeraria couldn’t understand after all, she still grasped just one thing. The detestable judgement and the poor conclusion of obeying to something called difference in pedigree just because they are royalty or nobles, Hifumi wants to raise the number of people being judged by their true strength.
This is an extremely frightening world, but Imeraria mustn’t fail to protect the country within such world.
Although she has no power to fight herself, she is able to come up with something. Hifumi said. There are also people surviving by using their head even without resorting to brute strength.
Think, and ponder about it, Imeraria tells herself. As it is now, the contest to become the sovereign will begin between the Imeraria faction and the Ayperos faction. It will result in many people dying. Even Ayperos or her mother might be amongst those.

“Everyone” (Imeraria)

With Imeraria starting to talk, the crowd’s noise subsided into silence and everyone listened to her words.

“Due to Vichy and Horant this country is in peril now. However, thanks to the great efforts of the newly inaugurated earl, Hifumi-sama, a big miracle has happened.” (Imeraria)

Ooh~ … with the people raising their voices in admiration, voices giving praise to Hifumi can be heard.
Sabnak’s voice was amongst them as well.

“They are getting elated easily… ” (Hifumi)

The voice of Hifumi, who had a forced smile, reached Imeraria’s ears.

Then she suddenly hit upon a good idea.

“But, expecting the fight to finishing flawlessly, knights ended up loosing their life due to my blunder! Even though it would have been fine to just leave things to Hifumi-sama, because of me getting unnecessarily involved, valuable lives were lost!” (Imeraria)

Exaggeratedly covering her face with both hands, Imeraria was convinced that this matter would cause her popularity to drop. If she lost the support of the populace with this, it would become a setback in the plan of using her to manage the country.
Although this might cause her death, she didn’t intend to live just to become her own brother’s enemy.
Looking at Hifumi while concealing her face … he was grinning.

“Now then, Ladies and Gentlemen! The story just now is the truth, but I think it will be wrong for me to blame Imeraria-sama for that!” (Hifumi)

Slowly surveying the crowd, he makes sure that everyone is listening carefully.

“I, who fought in order to protect the country, feel obliged to forgive Imeraria-sama. That being the case, shouldn’t the knights, who had been deployed by Imeraria-sama for the sake of protecting us and the people of our country and died fighting towards that cause, receive our admiration?!” (Hifumi)

The crowd surged in response to Hifumi’s appeal.
Even though the knights of the Third Knight Unit, mixed amongst the crowd, were perplexed, it became a situation where the people couldn’t be controlled anymore.

“Imeraria-sama, me and all of you have to rack our brains how to protect the people, who are citizens of the same country as us! For this reason, think about it! It mustn’t be allowed for someone, who doesn’t attempt to do something and to accomplish something for this country, to take the throne! The only person suitable to stand up and lead us is Imeraria-sama!” (Hifumi)

With Hifumi’s words raising Imeraria to the top, the crowd is gradually becoming excited. Originally only being a person having popularity, with the hero approving of her conduct, the people welcome the mysterious feeling of expectation.

“I will make an oath here! I will support Imeraria-sama in becoming the queen. Together we will change this country into a country holding strong power! Everybody, please also support Imeraria-sama together with me!” (Hifumi)

The words of Hifumi, desiring for everyone’s individual support, had a powerful impact on the crowd. Until now it was strictly forbidden for them to meddle in politics, but just now the noble and princess in front of their eyes, admitting their own failures to the populace, said that the support of the people was indispensable.
As there were also those who applauded towards the princess, Hifumi’s praising voice became even louder.
Even after Hifumi accompanying Imeraria disappeared from the balcony, the agitation of the people didn’t die down for quite a while.

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“Now they have done it… ”

The story of Hifumi supporting Imeraria in succeeding the throne spread in a flash within the king’s castle.
Those of the prince faction are irritated by those news without hiding that.
Especially the high-ranking nobles, leading the faction, mistook the method as coup d’état performed in the absence of the prince within their raging minds.
The prince’s real mother, the queen, is amongst them as well.

“By no means I expected Imeraria to have such an ambition.” (Queen)

Her appearance, enduring her fury while gritting her teeth with grinding sounds, is somehow blood-curdling.
Having been the queen so far, rather than Imeraria, who would be married off to someone anyway, she loved Prince Ayperos, who would succeed as king sooner or later, dearly.
Although she believed that Imeraria had understood this as well, her facial expression is becoming even more grim due to the feeling called betrayal.

“However, Imeraria-sama is perfectly suited for the support of the populace.” (Noble)

“Something like the support of the commoners doesn’t matter at all! Haven’t you heard? The young nobles wanting to give the princess their advice were all killed! Even the conservative nobles won’t forgive this much oppression!” (Queen)

“If that’s the case, there is nothing left but to have Imeraria leave the stage eventually, it seems… ” (Noble)

“O-Oi… ” (Another Noble)

The speaking nobles, noticing that the princess’ real mother, the queen, is present at this place albeit being hostile towards the princess, fearfully turned their gaze in the direction of the queen.

“It doesn’t matter. It is that child that has betrayed me, as her mother, first.” (Queen)

Declaring this decisively, the queen immediately raised her hand in order to prepare for giving a command.

“So that you aren’t hindered by that man, kill that girl instantly at the time when she is sleeping in her bedroom! The most my maternal love allows is to ensure her passing away without having to suffer.” (Queen)

Seeing the pupils oozing with madness, the nobles of the prince faction bowed their heads all at once.

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Chapter 46 – We Will Rock You

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Sabnak and Midas patrolled the king's castle upon Imeraria's order while armed.
The veil of darkness had already descended within the castle. Having only a minimal lighting by the magical lamps, the darkness further down the long corridors appears to be spreading forever.

"Something like patrolling with Midas-senpai, that's something that happened during training when I entered the Knight Unit, right?" (Sabnak)

It's been a while since they wore normal armor. Wondering what this feeling of discomfort was, Sabnak occasionally adjusted the armor's fasteners while making an effort to be cheerful.

"Can't you be a bit more silent? We don't know when it will turn into a battle." (Midas)

"But, a thief or such won't break into the castle, no? Those coming and going are thoroughly checked by the First Knight Unit and there are also some members of the Third Knight Unit making their rounds in the vicinity of the castle, isn't that so?" (Sabnak)

Midas sighed at Sabnak who was under the impression that the castle's inside was safe.

"What happened today? Even you should know that, I suppose." (Midas)

"Are you talking about the matter of Imeraria-sama announcing her intention to inherit the crown?" (Sabnak)

"So, though the First Knight Unit usually is guarding this castle, why do you think we were mobilized? … That's the answer to your question." (Midas)

Discovering the figures of people ahead in front, Midas stops and draws his sword.
Before his eyes there are three members of the First Knight Unit standing holding their spears.

"Going beyond this point is forbidden." (Knight)

One of the First Knight Unit's members said.
Midas remembered this man. He was an excellent knight amongst the Knight Unit. He heard that there were rumors of him being promoted to the rank of vice-captain soon. He is called Frederik *(T/N: >> Furederikku <<)*. Talking about the skill in swordsmanship, Midas, being amongst the lower-middle ranks within the Third Knight Unit, was clearly at disadvantage at any rate.
But he can't simply turn back while saying "Yes, that's how it is."

"We have been summoned to Imeraria-sama's room farther down this hall. Let us pass." (Midas)

"Hah, if you are from the Third Knight Unit, why are you trying to sneak around and conceal yourself? In this situation it will become an achievement if we boldly kill you guys." (Frederik)

Even though Frederik is laughing scornfully, Midas is watching the other party calmly.

“What is your aim… ? No, I know what you’re scheming. But to move this quickly.” (Midas)

“This was commanded by the lady possessing the most authority in this country. It is impossible for anyone to prevent it. And, each of us, who protect the royal castle, believe that we are contributing to the kingdom’s stability.” (Frederik)

“Even the act of stealing the life of a young girl?” (Midas)

“We can’t expose the country to danger just to protect a single life.” (Frederik)

Towards Midas’ inquiry, Frederik answered as if it was a natural matter.

“A girl’s life… Midas-san?!” (Sabnak)

“It appears that Her Majesty the Queen is moving in order to remove Imeraria-sama. It seems that the First Knight Unit sides with Her Majesty.” (Midas)

“That’s how it is. I don’t recall your face, but that young fellow is called Sabnak or something, right? Since I am hearing that you are an excellent knight, I will promote you to the First Knight Unit, if you support us now.” (Frederik)

As he heard the talk about being promoted, Sabnak got angry.
Originally, the popular names like First or Second are nothing more than the order how the Knight Units are organized. But, having a high percentage of high-ranking nobles as alumnae, the First Knight Unit, based on their showy defense of the castle, has many members who look down upon the other Knight Units.
It seems that even Frederik hasn’t escaped this custom.
Don’t let him provoke you! Sabnak restrains himself.

“What a foolish thing. If you think about the people standing on Imeraria-sama’s side currently, you should know that this is suicidal.” (Sabnak)

“The fools are you guys of the Third Knight Unit. Letting such trash as that risen earl do as he pleases! Becoming enthusiastic about someone you don’t even know where he comes from nor what kind of person he is, I wonder what’s up with that princess.” (Frederik)

Slamming the spear’s pommel onto the ground, Frederik’s face, warping unseemly, revealed his rage.

“If it were me, I would have already gotten rid of that man! He is returning to his territory while those within the king’s castle are shivering in fear where this man called Hifumi is concerned. Such unsightly behavior! Although the point of today’s operation by Her Majesty’s plan focuses on the time Hifumi isn’t here, originally it would have been better to properly cut that guy to pieces straight from the front.” (Frederik)

“Fufu” (Sabnak)

Watching the enraged Frederik, Sabnak ended up bursting into laughter unintentionally.

“What’s so funny!” (Frederik)

“No… I just think that it isn’t smart to underestimate Hifumi-san in such manner.” (Sabnak)

Which reminds me, if Pajou-senpai had been only a little bit more careful, she might have avoided dying.
Remembering her face, Sabnak’s laughter changed into a bitter smile.

“Wha…” (Frederik)

Frederik’s angry voice, trying to inhale, was stopped by the shuriken stuck in his neck.

Owed to the overwhelming force, Frederik's head was thrown back as he collapsed while spurting out blood.

"Uwa?!" (Knight A)

"Frederik!" (Knight B)

His colleagues standing on both sides quickly caught his falling body, but they knew that he had already passed away.

"This is… " (Sabnak)

Thinking it was Hifumi, Sabnak and Midas turned around and saw Origa, whose face had become white and expressionless due to overwhelming fury.

"… I decided to come and have a look since it became noisy, just to hear this filthy mouth slandering Hifumi… !" (Origa)

Origa, without paying Sabnak and Midas any attention, was looking at the surviving knights of the First Knight Unit.
Midas, judging it to be dangerous, escaped by dragging Sabnak to the side of the corridor.

"Bastard! Who are you!" (Knight B)

One of the knights approached Origa pushing out their spear, but she didn't move while holding out her right hand in front.
Without understanding what she was trying to do, at the moment he stopped to fix his spear stance, Origa removed the soldier's head from the neck with her wind magic.

"There is no need for me to tell scum like you guys my name." (Origa)

Murmuring this in a small voice as if it is fine for them to not hear it, her line of sight turns towards the remaining knight.

"Hasn't that girl somehow gradually turned more scary from before?" (Sabnak)

"Shh! Be quiet!" (Midas)

Without it being clear whether she didn't hear Sabnak's words or decided to ignore them, Origa's gaze didn't waver.

"D-Don't come closer!" (Knight A)

After seeing that she didn't use the wand to display her magic, he judged it to be an unknown attack and readied his spear while slowly retreating.
Even so, without stopping her feet, just as he thought so, Origa took out a rod, that was a little longer than 30 centimeters, from her bosom and gracefully held it in one hand.
It was an iron folding fan, though it was something that no one in this world had seen before.
Everyone, who were at the scene, couldn't contain their feeling of perplexity due to the unknown metal craftsmanship. Origa caressed the iron-ribbed fan with rapt attention.

"She took out a strange thing once again… " (Knight A)

These words were prohibited.

"Strange… ? You are calling this iron-ribbed fan I received from Hifumi-sama strange…" (Origa)

With her green pupils shining darkly, Origa briskly walked up to the knight and swung her folding fan from the right

hand side to the left.

“Ubeh… ?” (Knight A)

Without reacting to Origa’s movement, the knight was bewildered as the flesh of his cheek was torn off completely.

“Insulting this weapon is like insulting Hifumi-sama. Apologize by dying.” (Origa)

With a sound of *bashitto* she folded up the iron-ribbed fan and stabbed it into the throat of the knight who was writhing as he held his face.
The fallen knight spurt out blood from his mouth with a *buwa* and died without even twitching. Imitating Hifumi, Origa retrieved a paper from her breast pocket and gently wiped the iron-ribbed fan clean before putting it back with great care.
She turns her gaze, which had become only slightly tender, towards Midas and Sabnak.

“Midas-san, Sabnak-san, what do you think about the weapon you have seen just now?” (Origa)

“I-It seems e-easy to use. I-I think it i-is a fine w-weapon.” (Sabnak)

“T-That’s r-right. I-I think it s-somewhat matches y-our elegance.” (Midas)

As the two desperately lined up words of praise in panic, Origa smiled sweetly.

“Thank you very much. As thanks I will pretend to forget about your impolite comments from before.” (Origa)

(She heard them!) (Midas)
Disregarding the frozen Sabnak with his forced smile, Midas bowed towards Origa.

“You have my thanks for saving us. Had it stayed like that, we wouldn’t have had a chance of victory.” (Midas)

“There is no need to thank me. I just came looking for you guys following Hifumi-sama’s instruction.” (Origa)

“Us?” (Midas)

“Yes, I am to tell you, “From now on until dawn, not a single person is allowed to leave the castle.” I shall help you with this task as well.” (Origa)

“Just what the heck…” (Midas)

“It’s nothing but a little hunt within the cage.” (Origa)

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It was 10 elite soldiers picked from among the First Knight Unit who broke into Imeraria’s bedroom.
Shoving the maid standing in front of the door on standby by brute force aside, the knights clasped their spears tightly and quietly opened the door. They glared at the bed with its canopy attached situated in the middle of the room you wouldn’t consider to be a bedroom due to its sheer degree of vastness.
Their mission is to kill the girl sleeping there currently. While persuading themselves that it is for the sake of the country, they are slowly approaching the bed.

“Prepare yourself!”

Wholeheartedly not wanting to watch the moment the young lady dies, they are continuing to stab their spears one by one at the bulging bed cover from the outside the thin curtains of the canopy.
As they sensed the spears penetrating flesh, feelings of guilt were planted within the knights, but they suppressed

their hearts by reminding themselves that this was a just cause.

“How regrettable”

As a katana protruded from the other side of the curtain, the carotid artery of the neck of one of the knights was severed.
Within the downpour of blood Hifumi comes out from within the curtains while swinging his katana.
In his left hand he is holding the corpse of a woman riddled with spear holes. He tossed it in front of the faltering knights. At the time they comprehended that this was the corpse of the queen, the knights couldn’t do anything but lose their presence of mind unable to swallow the current state of affairs.
However, there was only one single knight amongst them who was different.

“All hands, get ready! Don’t get panicked in front of the enemy!”

Due to the roar in a thunderous voice for the knights to not let down their guard and prepare themselves, the other knights fixed their spear stance having life return into their eyes.

“Hee… ” (Hifumi)

With a completely delightful facial expression Hifumi descended from the bed. He kicked the queen’s corpse to the side in order to put it out-of-the-way.

“I’d like you to not obstruct us, Earl Tohno. Where is Imeraria-sama?”

“Who gives a damn about something like that. What is your name?” (Hifumi)

“I am called Deumus, vice-captain of the First Knight Unit. Earl Tohno, please, I’d like you to tell us the whereabouts of the princess” (Deumus)

“Even though your master has passed away over there?” (Hifumi)

“You still want to go on?” hearing this from Hifumi, Deumus clenched his teeth.

“We have sworn our lives to the duty of Prince Ayperos to become king. For that reason we can’t stop here … If you plan to hinder us, I will have you die.” (Deumus)

“If that’s the case, let’s get going.” (Hifumi)

Grabbing his katana with both hands, he stepped forward with his left foot by half a step in order to hide his back.
On a first glance this can be seen as defenseless stance, but Deumus isn’t able to discover a gap he can thrust his spear into. As the katana doesn’t enter his visual field, he can’t fathom in what way it might approach him.
(This much…) (Deumus)
Deumus doesn’t know anything about Hifumi’s strength except what he read in the reports. But now he experiences it for the first time himself.
In contrast to Deumus, who is attempting to close the distance between them impatiently, Hifumi sets up calmly.
Another knight couldn’t stand the tension.

“U-uooo!”

Against the knight releasing fierce thrusts, Hifumi cut off the spear diagonally in a flash as if scooping it up. And moreover, as he was using the blade to slash it diagonally from the shoulder he severed the knight’s foot from its root.

“Ugiyaaaaaaa!”

The one-legged knight, rolling around in circles, died before long due to loss of blood.

“What was that just now… ?”

Someone mutters.
Deumus barely managed to watch the sword’s path, but the others didn’t grasp what happened. Without even taking a single step, Hifumi executed two slashes within a person’s breath visible only by him turning his waist.

“Come, come, come on, there are still a lot of you ・・left!” (Hifumi)

Hifumi, returning to his previous stance of halving his left foot in front, says in a jesting tone.

“If you lot don’t get going … I will.” (Deumus)

Just that they would instead become a hindrance to Deumus, the other knights retreated to the rear.
Conversely, making only one step forward, Deumus, lowering his posture, prepares his spear.

“You are dangerous. I will end it here even if it means stabbing each other.” (Deumus)

“That’s good. It’s fine for you to try.” (Hifumi)

“Nuu!” (Deumus)

The first to move was Deumus.
Equal to the speed of Hifumi’s katana just now, Deumus drives the spearhead into Hifumi’s face.
Hifumi shifts his stance by drawing back the left foot a half step. He moves back until Deumus’ attack just barely doesn’t reach him. Without changing his posture, he cuts upwards with his katana.

“That’s a technique I have seen before!” (Deumus)

Swiftly pulling back his spear, he deflects the katana with the spearhead and used that force to thrust the spear a second time.
While drawing the katana back to himself, Hifumi averts the spearhead coming for him from the side to the outside.
After this instant of offence and defence, Deumus took his distance.

“You are well skilled. You are using your spear quite proficiently. But your manners aren’t very good.” (Hifumi)

Deumus doesn’t answer.
Changing his posture, Hifumi adopts a stance of directly aiming at the eyes with his katana.

“There is still a hopeless guy I haven’t killed yet. I will finish it soon because I am sleepy.” (Hifumi)

Before Hifumi finished his words, Deumus drove his spear aiming at Hifumi’s heart.
As Hifumi doesn’t show any intention to avoid it, Deumus is confident in his victory.
(Gotcha!) (Deumus)
But, Hifumi’s body, which should be turned to the front, is turning sideways before Deumus noticed it. The spearhead passes by through empty air on the left side in the space between the arms
And, separating his left arm, Hifumi, holding the katana in his right hand, pinned down the side of the spearhead and faced Deumus directly.

“Pinning down the spear by holding it between your arm and body… How absurd…” (Deumus)

Piercing the abdomen through the gap in the armor, though blood was leaking out from his mouth, Deumus showed a face of astonishment rather than pain.

“At best you are able to push or pull before it snaps. There is no problem to get in-between that.” (Hifumi)

“What a guy…” (Deumus)

As Deumus crumbled down, Hifumi shook off the blood of his katana. The remaining knights, without knowing what would be the right thing to do, recklessly came rushing in as they wanted to at least kill the enemy in front of them.

“Too slow.” (Hifumi)

Even though there were eight knights left and although they wore proper armor, their throats were cut sequentially with a minimum of movement. One by one they dropped into the pool of blood they had produced themselves. Changing all of the knights into corpses, Hifumi, returning the katana into its scabbard and inhaling the smell of blood, laughed.

“That was fun.” (Hifumi)

Let’s go looking for fellows who show some kind of reaction. Hifumi had taken a liking to this world albeit only slightly.

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Chapter 47 – Not Meant For Me

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Having put 10 knights to the sword, Hifumi is sheathing the katana in the scabbard on his back very contentedly.
Imeraria timidly made an appearance from within the shadows of the bed.
Although he senses her movements, Hifumi doesn't even look at Imeraria as if not caring about her existence at all.
As she shifts her line of sight to the corner of the room, where Hifumi had sent her mother flying before, she saw the queen's corpse.
Observing her mother having died while displaying a reproachful facial expression, Imeraria was confused whether it was fine to mourn or to rejoice.
Looking at her own room ornamented with splatters of blood, she is re-thinking how it came to this.

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Together with Hifumi, Imeraria ended up announcing her intention of inheriting the crown in front of the populace.
The very same day, after quickly finishing her work, she returned to her bedroom.

"Why has such thing… ?" (Imeraria)

Changing into a light red night-gown, Imeraria sat down on the bed and heaved a long sigh.
With a terribly worn-out mood, she feels her heavy shoulders.

"I wonder what the hell he is thinking?" (Imeraria)

Imeraria still can't comprehend Hifumi's thought process.
Obviously the reason isn't that he wants to become the king. Going by the information from the Knight Unit, it seems that he has ended up entrusting the administration of his territory, with only a few policies, to the civil officials. Furthermore, even reducing the overall tax rate and reaching the point that the territorial soldiers are close to the masses, his reputation amongst the majority of the populace appears to be good.
Although he is using a lot of funds for the development of weapons and such, it isn't like he is particularly living in luxury. If he has spare time, he will look around strolling through the city. Many people have witnessed him doing such things as practicing his swordsmanship.
"He is a feudal lord who is fair and kind towards the populace and doesn't shirk away from putting in effort for the sake of protecting the people."
That seems to be the evaluation being held by many people about Hifumi.
As that assessment is totally different from the one she came to see and hear about, Imeraria can't suddenly believe that this is the same person they are talking about.

"Do you hate the royalty and nobles?" (Imeraria)

Even though she pondered about that, she had also received a report stating that he had killed a considerable number of the slum's inhabitants. Simply put, without concerning himself about social status and official position, there doesn't seem to be any deciding factor but only whether or not one is hindering him. That summed it up entirely.
She is at her wit's end as she thinks about it.

Having obtained the support of the masses, there is no one else as difficult to deal with as that lunatic. If she removes him unskillfully, she will end up being viewed as villain here.
The lost Imeraria's ears pick up the sound of knocking.

"What's the matter?" (Imeraria)

There was a maid waiting for orders in front of the bedroom, but she entered nervously.

"That is… Earl Tohno has come…" (Maid)

Towards the baffled maid, Imeraria sighed for the umpteenth time today.

"Visiting the room of an unmarried woman at night-time… It doesn't matter, please let him through." (Imeraria)

"However…" (Maid)

The maid seems to be worrying about the danger and rumors of letting a man enter the princess' bedroom, but Imeraria doesn't care about Hifumi's lack of common sense anymore.

"There is no problem. It still can be called good that he didn't just come and enter forcibly." (Imeraria)

"That's a reprehensible way of talking about someone." (Hifumi)

Pushing the maid aside, Hifumi entered.
He is carrying some large package on his shoulders.

"Receiving my ill manners is something called minimal resistance. And? What might that be?" (Imeraria)

"Before that." (Hifumi)

Interrupting Imeraria's words, Hifumi turned around to the maid.

"Get in touch with the Third Knight Unit and tell them to come here. Let's see… Call out to the nearby Midas and tell him to come here armed for the sake of guarding." (Hifumi)

As the maid is darting her eye's about due to suddenly receiving orders, Imeraria commanded her to do as she was told.
With the maid leaving the place after bowing, Hifumi tosses the package, he was carrying, on top of the bed. The long and narrow object was thrashing around on the bed.

"…!"

"Oh, it woke up." (Hifumi)

"This… is it a living creature?" (Imeraria)

Imeraria instinctively jumped back from the bed and hid herself in Hifumi's shadow.

"There isn't any need to be so scared. It's your mother after all, I guess?" (Hifumi)

Although the queen's hair was disheveled and her clothes were stripped off, she was glaring at Hifumi in a condition of having her hands tied behind her back and a gag forced into her mouth.

"M-Mother?!" (Imeraria)

As Hifumi removed the gag, a scream burst out from her.

“Behaving in such manner towards me, do you really think this will finish peacefully!” (Queen)

“Hi-Hifumi-sama, why did you do such a… ?” (Imeraria)

Imeraria grabbed Hifumi’s arm. The queen changed the target of her verbal attack, of what she thought about this treatment, towards her daughter.

“Imeraria! I never expected you to use such a sort of way! To seduce a man into doing something like binding your mother… Finally you showed your true feelings because you are aiming for the crown!” (Queen)

“Mother…” (Imeraria)

Due to her mother scowling at her with a bloodcurdling facial expression, even Imeraria lacks any words.

“That’s how it is. Somehow this fellow wants the prince to succeed the crown one way or another rather than Imeraria.” (Hifumi)

The queen snapped once again at Hifumi, saying this as if it is someone else’s problem.

“Be quiet! You king-slaying, seriously criminal, person! You are a fool pretending to be a noble without even having officially been conferred the title by the king!” (Queen)

“Is that so?” (Hifumi)

“… If it’s the kingdom’s law, then there will be no problem with being appointed to the rank of a territorial noble. As for the usual procedure, only the king would be able to do that, but…” (Imeraria)

“In other words, her criticism is irrelevant.” (Hifumi)

Although Imeraria believed *Being a king slayer isn’t wrong, I think*, since it simply was “revenge” for Hifumi, he apparently doesn’t believe this to be a wrongdoing.
Well then, Hifumi’s story is: while considering how to deal with the current problem for the succession of the throne, the prince faction was in the process of setting up an ambush within the castle. He found out that the queen had ordered the First Knight Unit to assassinate Imeraria. Therefore, once the entire knight unit exited the room, he restrained the queen.
Without believing in this story, Imeraria looked at the queen, but the queen didn’t deny it.

“It is only appropriate for Ayperos to succeed the throne. Imeraria, above inviting someone, who plunged this country into a crisis, to come into the castle, you are unforgivably scheming to usurp the country itself!” (Queen)

Imeraria felt as if she had been plunged into darkness.
For the sake of protecting the peace of this country, she is desperate. So that the country doesn’t scatter into pieces due to losing its king, she is frantically thinking. Even though she should have acted.
After her mother had collapsed, for the sake of her yet youthful and helpless brother, she somehow got until here while also struggling.

“So, what will you do?” (Hifumi)

Imeraria came to her senses due to Hifumi’s question.

“What, as in… ?” (Imeraria)

“At present it feels like she is your enemy rather than mine. Since it will also be troublesome if she keeps yapping about usurpation, I brought her here for the time being.” (Hifumi)

Rather than getting angry she is astonished about Hifumi pridefully being concerned about her.

“Such thing like being an enemy…” (Imeraria)

“This fellow wants to kill you. How can you not call her an enemy?” (Hifumi)

“That is…” (Imeraria)

Suddenly and forcefully drawing his face close, Imeraria can’t continue talking.

“Also, if you keep her alive as is, I am certain it will turn into a domestic conflict between your and the prince’s faction within the castle. The confrontation will continue on the surface and behind the scenes. The ones receiving the brunt of that will be the maids and menservants, or in other words, the populace.” (Hifumi) (T/N: The devil whispers…)

Speaking towards Hifumi’s conveniences, if there are fewer operating the country, it will also become easy to control the law, to sum it up in a sentence. But he purposely left that unsaid.

“If this fellow survives, she will become the prince’s supporter one way or the other and be a hindrance to me, I am sure. If this fellow doesn’t exist, it might be possible that the prince becomes obedient as well. In that situation, I am confident that you will be able to establish the stable political system you desire.” (Hifumi)

Imeraria pondered about it while chewing her lower lip to degree of blood running down. It becomes an escape in that way and after consolidating her thoughts, she squeezed out her voice.

“It is impossible for me…” (Imeraria)

The queen’s expression displayed that this was only natural, but before long her face turned pale due to the following words.

“Therefore, I want to leave the decision to Hifumi, but…” (Imeraria)

“A-Are you abandoning your mother!” (Queen)

Who was it that aimed at whose life first? Imeraria thought. It was a mortifying decision, but she was able to consent with her current words.

“Then I won’t hold back.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi drew his katana and struck the thin neck of the queen, laying on the bed, with the back of his katana. Having her neck broken, the queen died with wide opened eyes.

“I wonder if that really was a good thing… ?” (Imeraria)

“I think it is still too early for you to decide that.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi lifted Imeraria at her waist and threw her down on the opposite side of the bed.

“Kyaa!” (Imeraria)

Hiding the queen’s corpse within the futon, he shuts the canopy’s curtains.

“Stay hidden for a while. There are several people coming this way here. Probably it is the lot from the First Knight Unit, coming to kill you.” (Hifumi)

“Midas’ group didn’t make it in time, huh?” Hifumi grumbled.

“Such…” (Imeraria)

Usually the knight unit is bound to protect her, having been told about them coming to kill her was something she couldn’t yet comprehend within her mind.

“Because I will be protecting you for now, desperately think about how you want to change your surroundings and what would be fine to do after this. The matter about inciting Pajou; the intention was good but the plan to execute it was inept.” (Hifumi)

Being abruptly praised, Imeraria floated a facial expression of suspicion.

“Without that the degree of backbone, it will be impossible for you to survive the wars starting after this. I wonder whether you want to exact your revenge upon me one day? If that’s the case, don’t trip at this place. I want you to show your desperate will to survive until your blade reaches me.” (Hifumi)

Clenching her teeth with a grinding sound, Imeraria fixed her eyes on Hifumi.

“Yes, that’s fine. Anything’s fine, even anger. A like-minded person, having a volition, will certainly clash with me. There has to be a meaning in killing each other. It has to be enjoyable.” (Hifumi)

Hifumi, pretending to not see Imeraria, drew his katana and ecstatically looked at the hamon. (T/N: Hamon: The visual effect created by the hardening process of the blade. Source: Wiki)
The footsteps of several people stop in front of the room.

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When Midas and Sabnak arrived at Imeraria’s bedroom, after struggling along the way, it was the exact moment when Hifumi left the room.
Hifumi, fighting with an enemy that gave some kind of resistance, had a truly refreshed facial expression even though it was night.

“Too late. I already took care of all the prey.” (Hifumi)

“Imeraria-sama is?” (Midas)

“She’s inside. Watch your steps as there are corpses scattered all over.” (Hifumi)

While wondering what his kindness was about, Midas entered the room. Though simple, the bedroom was provided with high-class furnishing. A great number of blood-stained corpses were spread on the floor.
Even the miserable figure of the queen is amongst those.

“Hear about the circumstances from Imeraria. I am off.” (Hifumi)

“You are off, you say? Where to?” (Sabnak)

“My distinctive job.” (Hifumi)

Seeing off Hifumi, who was passing through the corridor while leisurely shouldering the katana, Sabnak shook his head with a face full of astonishment.

“Haven’t the knight units been decreased around half with today? No, wait, the Second is absent, so the decrement is only one-third.” (Sabnak)

“Are you joking around in this situation? Please guide Imeraria-sama to the spare bedroom. We will keep guarding without change until morning.” (Midas)

“… Though it would be nice if it were just joking around.” (Sabnak)

Someone’s scream could be heard from the other side of the corridor.

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“Thus, since Hifumi-sama will be cleaning the trash out within the king’s castle after this, please make you rounds so that the trash doesn’t escape.” (Origa)

Suddenly coming to their office and even detaining those, with the exception of the knights on duty, wanting to go back, against their will, Origa gave the gathered knights of the Third Knight Unit an order under the pretense of it being an explanation.
Because all of them were aware what kind of standing the girl in front of them has, they abide obediently, as resisting it would be unwise, while having disgruntled thoughts.

“That… it is already time for me to go home…” (Female Knight)

“Not allowed.” (Origa)

“Not allowed you say…” (Female Knight)

With her colleagues consoling her to give up, the female knight sat down in resignation.

“Currently the castle is divided into the prince faction and the princess faction. It looks like the First Knight Unit is part of the prince faction. Going by Hifumi-sama’s explanation, it seems to be very likely that the First Knight Unit will move tonight in order to assassinate the princess.” (Origa)

“Whaat!”

“I don’t believe such foolishness. Not even as a joke. They are in the position of protecting the royal castle.”

Origa claps her hands in order to calm down the bewildered knights.

“At any rate, seeing that Hifumi-sama decided to make Imeraria-sama the queen, they will simply die if they turn hostile. As for the Third Knight Unit, you were given the role of restraining those trying to flee from the castle. Your location will be even further outside than the castle’s gate, which is guarded by the First Knight Unit.” (Origa)

Opening the iron-ribbed fan, she had retrieved from within her bosom, Origa is slowly swinging it for the sake of fanning the face while talking.

“B-But…”

“Even if it is Lord Tohno’s instruction, behaving as if hostile to a fellow knight unit…”

Origa interrupted the mumbling words of refusal with the closing of her iron-ribbed fan.

“As if hostile, that’s not it, you already are hostile to them. Or are you one of the prince’s faction? In short, as far as Hifumi-sama is concerned, you already are an enemy…” (Origa)

Seeing the hand holding the iron-ribbed fan being filled with strength at a glance, the elder knights went out ahead.

“Please wait! I will follow Imeraria-sama’s will. Haven’t you called Midas’ group for that sake as well?”

“That’s right. Besides, there isn’t any need to fight. During the time Hifumi-sama cleans the castle’s interior, it will be alright as long as no people enter or leave the castle. Also, please tidy up tomorrow morning.” (Origa)

Any more sweetness dripping out from Origa's cheerful smiling will be dreadful, the knights thought.

"Thanks to Hifumi-sama, the Third Knight Unit will take care of Imeraria very closely within the king's castle. You will likely reach the point of being treated as very influential war potential." (Origa)

"In addition," Origa continues.

"If you are able to accept making an effort here in doing your job properly with a mindset of cooperation, then Hifumi-sama will kindly overlook the actions of the Third Knight Unit the other day, understand?" (Origa)

'Though I won't forgive you', Origa's eyes told them.

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In this way the Third Knight Unit got stuck with standing watch at the royal castle without a wink of sleep until the next morning.

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